







LECTURES ON  
STYLE AND COMPOSITION





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# LECTURES ON STYLE & COMPOSITION

BY  
E. CLASSEN

LECTURER ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, EAST LONDON COLLEGE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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## PREFACE

THIS little book, which is reprinted—with slight alterations—by the courtesy of Messrs. T. C. & E. C. Jack, from their *Guide to the English Language*, consists of a series of lectures on composition which were originally prepared for students of the Science Faculties of the University of Manchester. The purpose of the lectures was not only to afford instruction in essay-writing, but also to offer a groundwork of general principles by the aid of which the works of selected prose writers might with advantage be studied. It was felt that a mere enunciation of abstract principles, without constant illustration from standard works, could serve no useful purpose. If, therefore, this little book is to be of use either to teachers or students, the writer feels that, as has already been done to some extent in the book, it should be used in conjunction with some collection of prose extracts or essays.

E. CLASSEN.

LONDON, 1917.



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# STYLE AND COMPOSITION

## INTRODUCTION

THERE is a sense in which style and composition are the same thing; for composition, if we think of it as the art of composing, or writing, will coincide in its boundaries with those of style, which is also the art of writing. But there is also another sense of the word composition, which implies a number of grammatical and logical rules rather than anything which one could call art. In this latter sense, composition merely teaches us to arrange and group our thoughts in a logical order, and to express them in language which does no violence to the accepted rules of grammar. Its province, therefore, on the one hand, is much the same as the province of accidence and syntax, and, on the other hand, in so far as it teaches the orderly presentation of thought, it forms a part of logic. Composition in the sense in which we shall use the word here, aims at the achievement of clearness and intelligibility in writing. It has in view the reader as much as, and perhaps more than, the writer, and is to this extent social in its nature. But in so far as composition views the reader, it must provide, not for any particular reader, but for the generality of readers,

and must formulate its rules on the basis of the speech-forms and speech-usage in common use among those readers. It will therefore follow closely accepted usage in language.

Herein it differs from style; for it is of the essence of style that it is individual and not general. Two writers thinking of the physiological act known as blushing will give expression to their thought differently, according to the circumstances, and according to their power of expression. One of them might write, "She did not blush," but the other, with greater powers of imagination and of analysis, might write, as Meredith did, "There was not a sign of the torch in the blood." Both expressions would be perfectly correct from the point of view of grammar and composition, but it is clear that one of the expressions has a much more personal colour than the other. The first gives the thought in the most economical and everyday language, and is a bare statement of the fact; whilst the other is suggestive of the reflections of the writer, is informed by the shape and content of his mind, and is, for this reason, a purely personal expression.

Style may thus be said to be self-expression within the limits prescribed by grammar and logic, or, to put it more plainly, within the limits of intelligibility and clearness. The more a work discloses the personal feelings and attitude of the writer, the more readily it will claim and hold our interest; and, conversely, the more the personal note is absent, the more insipid it becomes. A grocer's catalogue may be said to have no style for this reason, for the only self-revelation

which it contains is the fact that the compiler sells groceries ; and this fact, though it may be of interest, can only be so if it is presented to us in such a way as to awaken our sympathy. In the same way a business letter, though it may express more of the desires of the writer, is yet clothed in such unimaginative and stereotyped language that it fails to make any appeal.

In the following pages we propose to point out in greater detail the chief characteristics of style, and then to proceed to an exposition of the main principles of composition. We shall begin with the consideration of style, because, as will appear later, the rules of composition must frequently give way to its demands.

## CHAPTER I

### STYLE

IT has already been said in the introduction that style, is the expression, in writing, of personality. Its relation to composition is very much the same as the relation of the important acts of a man's life to his little everyday actions ; for just as a man will show his character and will disclose his strength and weakness by his conduct in the important affairs of life, so also in a large number of cases he will do exactly as others do, and will follow the customs of the society in which he lives. He will wear clothes of a certain kind, will eat his meals in a certain way, and so on. It is the same in writing. In a broad way the individuality of the writer will show itself, but at the same time he will make use of words and phrases according to the tradition of the language. He will not use a singular subject with a plural verb ; he will not use words with such an unfamiliar meaning that they would not be understood by the reader.

This difference between composition and style is fundamental. Composition, in so far as it teaches clearness and intelligibility, is only a means to an end, an instrument which must be adapted to the end in view. The grocer's catalogue, admirable as it may

be from the point of view of composition, will not give the reader any impression of the grocer's shop. To do that something more is required: the words and phrases of which the catalogue is composed must be rearranged and regrouped in such a way as to reproduce the impression made by the shop on the mind of the writer. A certain creative effort is necessary, and the result of that creative and imaginative effort is style.

• But the desire to give expression to one's thoughts and emotions is always accompanied by another desire—to make that expression as fit, as excellent, in short, as beautiful as possible. A writer will ever seek to give to his words the form and colour of the thought which they embody. Any lack of harmony between the written words and the thoughts which they embody will jar upon him. He will not rest until he has re-established the unison between thought and expression, and it is just this striving for harmony, for the ideal of beauty, which still further distinguishes style from composition. In composition we find rather the purely negative and practical aim of avoiding grammatical errors and logical ambiguity.

If it is true that the functions of style are positive and ideal, and that those of composition are merely negative and practical, it is also true that style is progressive and creative, whilst composition is conservative and prescriptive. The rules of composition are the rules of grammar, and these are based entirely on what is usual in the speech of the majority of the well-educated members of the community. It follows, therefore, that grammar knows nothing of those idioms and

constructions which have not yet become general? All those new meanings of words, and all experiments in grammatical structure which are present in a language, and which may as yet be fighting their battle for existence, are unknown to the grammarian, because they are not generally accepted. All the subtle and indefinable changes of meaning in words, frequently of very slow growth, cannot be seized by the grammarian, because he is not always sure whether they will live or die. As yet all these potential changes are "exceptions," and the only exceptions which the grammarian acknowledges are the old-fashioned ones. From his point of view the new exceptions are not exceptions at all; they are errors, violations of grammatical rules. From this fact it is obvious that grammar is founded on the speech-habits of the preceding generation, and not on those of the present generation. Grammar, then, is conservative. It always lags, and always must lag, a little behind the language of the day, and unless one bears in mind that grammar was made for language, and not language for grammar, it is easy to see how grammar would prevent all change and development in language.

But this it has never been able to do. The creative instinct in man has always been too strong. Each one of us, in using language, turns it to his own purpose, moulds it, and adapts it; each one of us creates his own style. The sailor expresses himself in terms derived from his experience of the sea, the huntsman in terms derived from his experiences of the chase, and so on. In thus turning language to our own ends, each one of us is helping it to outstrip grammar, and to enlarge

its possibility of expression. The man—or the woman—who first combined *hair* and *pin* into one word was following his creative instinct, and added something new to the language, of which neither grammar nor dictionary knew anything before. In the same way each one of us is constantly adding something—perhaps not always so successfully—to the store of language. It is, of course, not only in giving new meanings and new applications to words that we modify or develop our language; we may do so by introducing new constructions, by modifying old ones, and in various other ways; but it is of importance to remember that these developments are individual, creative developments, and are, as such, a part of style. It should be borne in mind that these innovations are frequently direct and deliberate violations of grammatical rules, though later on, if they are generally adopted, they will appear in grammars as permissible exceptions. If their popularity should ever become so great that numerous other violations of the old rules of grammar are made on the same model, they will appear no longer as mere exceptions, but as rules.

It would appear, then, that the essence of style is personality. That this is really so may be shown perhaps still more clearly by an examination of some branch of literature. We may take for convenience' sake the essay. If we read, say, a dozen essays by different writers, preferably, if possible, on the same subject, we shall see, on reflection, that there is some general proposition underlying them all. With this general proposition we were already familiar. We need not have agreed with it, nor need we have known the



arguments, by which it was established ; but nevertheless it must have been intelligible to us, otherwise we could not have understood the essays. If, for example, we read Addison's essay "On Cheerfulness," printed on page 59, we may ask ourselves at the end of the perusal what it is all about, and answer, in a general way, "Cheerfulness is a good thing." Similarly it is possible to extract from any other piece of work a general proposition or a general truth already familiar. But although it is possible to formulate the central thought of an essay, it is certain that no two individuals would develop that thought in the same way. The reason is obvious. No matter what the subject on which we wish to write, we shall all, in some respect, think differently about it. The sea is a totally different thing to the child who goes to spend his summer holidays by its shores and to the fisherman who earns his daily bread on its waters. It has entered into the experience of the child in a manner as different as possible from the manner in which it has entered into the consciousness of the fisherman. The child associates the seaside with the innumerable joys of a holiday, with sandcastles and donkey-rides, with liberty and play ; the fisherman, on the other hand, associates it with a hard struggle for the means of existence in summer and winter, in wind and storm. It has entered into his whole conception of life to such an extent that he measures all his other experiences by standards derived from his knowledge of it. And so it is with all our thoughts and feelings. Each one of them links itself by association with the thoughts and feelings of the past ; and since there are no two human beings who

have quite the same fund of experience, it follows that in no two cases will the thoughts and feelings of two individuals be the same on a given occasion. And just as the possibilities of association are limitless, so also are the possibilities of expression. In so far, then, as we write faithfully what is in our minds and do not merely imitate; in so far as we analyse our thoughts and emotions sincerely, and endeavour to the best of our power to render faithfully in words the thoughts we have analysed, we shall be giving our own personal interpretation of whatever has entered into our consciousness. It is this personal elaboration, of a general truth or proposition which constitutes, in the last resort, style, it is this which explains why half a dozen different writers, setting out to describe the same object, or to advance arguments in favour of the same proposition, would all write in a different way. If we can disengage the commonplace and the universal in any piece of literature, then all that is left—the elaboration and the manner of presentation, the point of view, the sympathies and antipathies—are the personal element, and the words and the arrangement of the words which express them are the personal style.

In so far then, as style is the expression of personality, there will be as many different styles as there are individuals who write. Each type of mind will find its own manner of expression, its own style. The quick and vivid intellect will find expression in a spirited style; the careless or the undisciplined mind will find its expression in a weak or diffuse style. And so also in every kind of style, both its strength and its weakness must be sought in the mind and temper of the writer.

Any defects of style will, therefore, be traceable in the first instance to some defect in the thought of which the words are the expression. The first essential of good writing is thus that one should have something of sufficient interest or importance to write about, for no amount of mere beautiful expression will compensate for the absence of thought. If the words are not informed by an idea, they will never be able to rouse our curiosity or to hold our attention. The acquisition of material is therefore a necessary preliminary to good writing, and a study of the manner in which we acquire it is a necessary preliminary to the study of style.

But it is possible for a style to be weak even though the ideas which it expresses are good. This kind of weakness is to be traced to quite a different cause. In this case, since the material calling for expression is of the right kind, the weakness must necessarily lie in the language used for the expression of it. In other words, language does not render it faithfully. This possibility leads to a second point of view in studying style. We have now to ask ourselves how, when we have got our material, we are to use it. What are the means of expression at our command? How can we convey exactly the thought in our minds? Is it possible for the language to betray the thought?

The problem of style would thus seem to be twofold. First we must collect our material and make sure that it is of the right kind, and then we must give expression to it in such a way that the words we use faithfully embody our thoughts. Of these two problems the second only, as concerned primarily with the art of

expression, touches the problem of style. We have to inquire, therefore, what are the qualities of style which will induce us to read a book, and what are the qualities which will give us the satisfaction we expect to derive from reading it. This latter consideration brings to our notice the reader, and reminds us of the very important fact that we write in order to be read. We realise that there are two factors to be considered in the writing—namely, the writer and the reader. We have not only to discover the manner in which the writer collects his material and finds exact expression for it, but we have also to inquire what is the relation of the personal expression of the writer to the general demands of the reader. We have seen that one of the most important elements of style is the personality of the writer; but is there no limit to his liberty of expression? Does it ever conflict with the requirements of the reader?

Therefore there are two points of departure from which the problem may be approached. Firstly, that of the writer, who must give personal expression to his thought; and secondly, that of the reader, whose conceptions must also be respected. To some extent, then, there would seem to be a conflict between these two necessities. But the conflict is more apparent than real; for, after all, the writer is always a member of the community for which he writes, and will share the conceptions of that community. His thoughts will therefore naturally tend to find expression in a form acceptable to it. From the point of view of the reader, on the other hand, we must ask ourselves what is necessary in writing if it is to be read at all, and the

answer to this question may be said to be that the writing must be interesting and clear. From the point of view of the reader, therefore, we have to study the principles of interest and clearness in writing. From the point of view of the writer we must inquire what the means are by which an author gives expression to his thought and by which he arouses the interest of the reader.

It is obvious that there is no limit to the possible number of thoughts, though the number of words in the language and even the number of combinations of words is limited. How, then, give expression to innumerable thoughts with a limited number of words? What are the means and what the accessories by which this apparent miracle is achieved? A study of the art of expression will show all this. It will reveal the immense possibilities of language and its infinite resources of expression. It will show the sensitiveness of word-associations, and their wonderful suppleness and flexibility. It will show the precise value of the figures of speech, their function, and their possibilities as means of expression.

Fundamentally, style is a matter of thought; superficially, it is a matter of words, phrases, and constructions. A little reflection will show the truth of this statement. If two individuals set out to express in words the same thought, the result must, if the thought be exactly expressed, be the same. "The sun sets" is the expression of a thought which cannot be expressed exactly in any other way. "The sun sinks" means something different—very little different perhaps, but still different. "The red sun sinks below the

horizon " is different again ; it calls up new associations, is more vivid, more picturesque. Superficially the difference is only one of choice of words ; in other cases the difference may lie in the arrangement and grouping of words ; but the real difference between these various modes of expression lies deeper : it is to be found in the difference of the thought underlying the mere words.

That which characterises one writer as distinct from another is, therefore, his way of thinking, the harmonies which he is able to seize, the obscure relations between things which he alone is able to perceive, and express. It is for this reason that it is impossible to teach style, for if style is the art of expression, how is it possible to teach the unknown, or the art of expressing the unknown ? One can, it is true, analyse the style of others ; one can investigate the manner in which they give expression to their thought ; one can admire the subtlety and delicacy of the expression ; but it should not be forgotten that to the subtlety and delicacy of expression belong also an anterior subtlety and delicacy of thought, and it is just these which cannot be taught. We can discover that a piece of writing is forceful, or picturesque, or that it has one or other of the numerous qualities of good style, but we cannot imitate it unless our own thoughts have the same latent quality.

If the differences in the style of any two writers are simply a reflection of their different ways of thinking, then style is nothing more than the expression of personality. It is true that this conception of the nature of style has been condemned on the ground that it leads to affectation ; but that is only because, as will

appear later, the conception has been misinterpreted. If we may assume, then, that style is the expression of personality, it should follow that every one who puts pen to paper has his own style. And this is perfectly true, though the admission does not necessarily imply that every one has a distinctive style. But, it may be further urged, there are no two individuals with exactly the same way of thinking, and since style is the expression of thought every one should have his own distinctive style, reflecting that personality.

This objection leads us immediately to recognise that there is something more in style than the expression of personality: that, indeed, the expression must be faithful, complete, and accurate. All of us have different ways of thinking, all of us have a different fund of experience, all of us look upon even the most trivial and unimportant incidents of life from different points of view; but few of us succeed in reproducing them faithfully. Most of us, indeed, are content to represent them approximately, and to this end we use well-worn phrases and constructions, in the knowledge that our fellow-men will understand at any rate approximately what they stand for. These words and phrases are like worn coins: they pass current; they are immediately recognised, without any careful scrutiny, as coin of the realm; and they are known to stand for certain vague and indefinite possibilities. But they have not the stamp and the clear-cut lines of the new coin. They are everywhere accepted, though the inscription which they bear is not legible, and though one cannot see exactly what it tells us. So it is also with words and combinations of words. These also may be worn and

stereotyped, or they may be fresh and ever reminted. Thus it is that the infinite variety of thought and experience of countless millions of individuals is, in passing from thought to words, worn down to a monotonous and inexpressive average, which is anything but distinctive. Thus, though it is true that every living being, as surely as he has his own individuality, has the materials of a distinctive and personal style, yet he lacks the instinct, or the concentration, or the insight by which alone that individuality may be faithfully expressed in words.

Style in writing, then, looked at from this purely negative point of view of what is personal, would appear to be the faithful representation of a separate and peculiar experience. As such it should not therefore be restricted to individuals, but should also emerge wherever there is a broad line of demarcation between the materials of style—that is to say, wherever the range of experience of one group of individuals differs from that of another, *i.e.* in different classes of society, in different ages, in different countries. This expectation is in fact fulfilled, for we all of us speak of a French, German, or English style, of an academic or popular style, and the like. What, then, do we mean by speaking of an eighteenth century style as distinct from a sixteenth or nineteenth century style? We surely mean something quite distinct from the individual styles of Addison and his contemporaries; we mean something that is far from being individual, but rather common to all of them, something peculiar to the colour and tone of all of them, which the writers neither of the succeeding nor of the preceding centuries could



possibly possess. What else is this something but the reflection of the conditions of life peculiar to their day? To put the matter quite crudely: there were no motor-cars and no wireless telegraphy in those days, and therefore there is no mention of these things in their works; nor is there any sign of what these things stand for, or of the type of civilisation which produces them, or of the type of mind which is the outcome of them. The eighteenth century style, then, like the style of any other century, is the expression of the individuality of that century. No other century could produce that style, nor could the eighteenth century produce the style of any other century than its own. We might as well, indeed, expect a Greenlanders who had never left his native shores to write *The Egoist* as expect Addison to have written the *New Machiavelli*.

In exactly the same way, so long as a Frenchman remains a Frenchman and a German a German, the French style will differ from the German, and both will differ from the English. The life of the one—his institutions, his government, his education, his amusements, and his whole outlook on life—will differ fundamentally from these of the other. This could not be otherwise; for if it were, then the Englishman, or the Frenchman, or the German could pass from his own civilisation to that of any other country without being conscious of the change, and this is clearly not possible. It is doubtless for this reason that a complete mastery of a foreign language is one of the most difficult things to acquire, and that the number of those who have written successfully in a foreign language is very

limited. In a less degree, too, it accounts for the scarcity of first-rate translators, of men who are able to enter so thoroughly into the spirit of a foreign language, and of the thought which underlies it, as to be able to render it faithfully in their own language.

Just as there is a style peculiar to certain centuries and certain countries, so also there is a style peculiar to certain classes of the same society. It is quite natural, for example, that the style of a working man should differ from the style of the well-born and well-educated man of letters. The difference cannot be measured, or even accounted for, in terms of school or college education. The real cause of the difference lies much deeper than that: it is to be found in the different circumstances of life of the two classes, in the different environment and range of experience. It would be just as unreasonable to expect similarity of style in the work of two men drawn from widely separated classes and with widely differing experiences of life, as it would be to expect similarity in style in Bunyan and Bernard Shaw. The habits of mind and thought in the two cases are so different, the material for reflection so fundamentally opposed, that it would be wonderful indeed if there were any close resemblance in style.

Differences in style thus correspond to differences of outlook and to different mental, moral, and physical foundations. The same causes as are at work in the case of nations and centuries are also at work in individuals. Thought and experience form the irreducible minimum of every style, from the highest to the lowest. But these differences only become apparent when

translated into words. Until they are given form and shape in words they remain latent, undeveloped differences, so that the immediate problem of style is concerned with an analysis of the use of words. It is by the use of words alone that thought is communicated, and it is by the good or bad use of words that style becomes good or bad. It is true that the proper grouping and classification of thoughts is also of importance as a quality of style, but it is possible to have a perfectly clear piece of composition—that is to say, clear from the point of view of arrangement—without good style. Clearness is possible of achievement by attention to the ordinary rules of logic and syntax, and therefore falls rather under the head of composition, under which it will be treated in the next section. But that more subtle something, on the other hand, which goes under the name of good style, and which is immediately recognised by every reader, springs almost entirely from the writer's special gift in the use of words.

A word is a symbol for a thing or for a thought. But the thing or the thought which it symbolises is infinitely more complex than the symbol. The word *house* is a mere aggregation of sounds, but the things it stands for are many. It conjures up numerous mental images and many sensations. Still more numerous are the associations which the mention of it awakens. It recalls shape and size, colour and material, length, breadth, and height; it calls up images of doors and windows, of roofs and walls, of rooms and cellars, of chimney-pots and stairs. It may perhaps remind us of some particular house in which we have lived, and

in that case it brings with it a further train of associations. But in using a word we do not necessarily think of all these elements of meaning at the same time; some of them are not necessary to our immediate purpose when we pronounce a word. Thus the word *house* is never used alone. We say that we have just moved into a new house, and by saying this we mean by *house* a place to dwell in, and the other meanings of the word are not brought prominently forward in our consciousness. But if we say *a white house*, we call up images and associations of quite a different kind. In this case we think rather of the outer walls, and of their colour, and do not at all think of such details as the rooms in the house, or the number of staircases or bathrooms contained in the house. On the other hand, if we speak of a *beautifully decorated house* or a *well-furnished house*, our thoughts turn to certain of the accidentals of the house; we no longer think of brick or stone or rough-cast. What has happened, then, to the meaning of the word *house* in these examples? We see, indeed, that the meaning has varied; that certain elements of meaning have been called into consciousness, while others have been left to slumber on in the mind. What has really happened in the above cases is that the adjectives *new*, *white*, *well-furnished*, *beautifully decorated* are guardians of the word *house*, they watch over it and keep it within certain bounds. Or, differently expressed, they are censors, standing at the threshold of consciousness, refusing admittance to all those members of the throng of meanings associated with the word *house* which do not accord with the spirit of the accompanying words.

It is not, however, only the immediate neighbour, which thus influences the latitude of meaning of particular words; the whole context does so also. For example, in the above sentence, "I moved into a new house," the word *new* is not the word which by itself calls up the meaning *dwelling-place*; *new-house* by itself means something quite different from *dwelling-place*. What limits the meaning both of *new* and *house* in this sentence, is the context, *I moved into*. So it is with all words. Each one has the latent power to call up numerous meanings, sensations, and images. The mind is fully peopled with them, ever ready to do service at the call of a word. The mind is stored with the memory of all our thoughts and experiences; in the mind they rub shoulders, associate, combine, group and regroup themselves in the process called thought, and words are the external symbols of those thoughts. Each word therefore is dependent on its fellows, and only in the rarest of cases can we communicate our thought in a single word. We use words in sentences, and in sentences words take on that meaning which is determined by other words. Any one sense of a word may combine with any of the senses of any other word. Indeed, it is just because most words have so many possible meanings and are so rich in associations, and because each one of these meanings and associations can combine with the meanings and associations of other words, that the resources of language as a means of expression are seemingly unlimited. If a word had only one fixed, and unchanging meaning, our powers of expression would be very limited in comparison with the complexity of our thought. In science, it is true, words—or some

of them—have only one meaning; but ordinary language, especially the language of literature, requires something more flexible and suggestive than the word which has only one meaning.

It is the perfect knowledge and exploration of this great mine of possibilities of expression and suggestion which stamps the stylist. He knows how to combine a few words in such a way that, when they enter the mind of the reader, they will be rich in suggestion; they will stimulate associations, they will suggest that which cannot be expressed in so many words, and catch the reflection of things themselves invisible. As Professor Raleigh says: "In such a phrase as 'the angel of the Lord,' language rocks the positive rivalry of the pictorial arts, which can offer only the poor pretence of an equivalent in a young man painted with wings."

Words are constantly changing in their significance. They assume the manners of the company they keep, and they adapt themselves to their environment. Whether as presenting images or as suggesting meaning they will reveal their life-history: *Idiot*, from meaning a private person, has come to mean one who is in some way mentally deficient, and in this change of meaning is reflected the opinion which some part of the community once held of private persons. The change of meaning is due, as in so many other cases, to some emotional attitude to the thing symbolised by the word. The young Greek who came to a private English boarding-school, and called the proprietor an idiot and his school an idiotic school, was doing something more than reproach the institution; he was unwittingly

pointing out the difference of certain social and political conditions or developments in England and in Greece.

Sometimes words come to approach each other so closely that their meanings become confused, and what are called synonyms arise. But in the vast majority of cases the changes of meaning in words have the opposite tendency: to increasing fineness of distinction and to the development of new meanings. But even where words do approach very near in meaning, there is never complete coalescence, there is never complete identity. What are called synonyms are not absolute synonyms; there is always some shade of difference in the meanings of them, as is shown by the existence of dictionaries of synonyms, the function of which is to make clear those differences. The fact is that language has no room for synonyms. Its resources are not so great that it can afford to have a word lying idle, and so it either differentiates the meaning of one of the synonyms still further, or it allows it to die out. Where two words approach in meaning, the whole instinctive force of language tends to separate them again.

Since the so-called synonyms really have some slight difference of meaning, they may prove of real value in achieving variety of expression. They not only help to avoid the monotony which arises from the repetition of a word within a short space, but they also help to clarify the sense by adding a new point of view, by throwing fresh light on the subject, and by showing things in a new relation. Then, too, since a word may change its meaning in a new context, it may happen that the repetition of it might be inappropriate

or even misleading. So mutually, adhesive and so intimately associated are words, that, rather than tear them out of their context, it is often better to substitute a synonym in an altered context. In addition to the gain which may sometimes be derived in this way from a change of word, the balance and the euphony of the sentence may be improved also.

Style, then, at bottom is the dress of thought, and the better it fits, the better the style. Every writer must struggle with the material of language—with words and combinations of words—until he has found out the right dress for his thought. He must shift his ground, and even change his meaning, until at last he is successful in his quest. Often it may happen that he cannot find the expression for his thought; he may search in vain for the word or phrase. But he will not be satisfied with any substitute; he will prefer to leave something unsaid, rather than to say it imperfectly. This is what is meant by sincerity, which is present in all writing that carries conviction. It is sincerity, faithfulness to our own thought, which drives us to seek for the exact expression of our meaning. It is the desire to be true to our thoughts which drives us to wrestle with language until it yields itself to our wishes. Every one of us must wrestle in this way at some time or other, for there is nothing so real in language as the fact that it binds us down and clips the wings of our thought, if we would allow it to do so. We all of us feel its restraint. We cannot write down even the simplest thought without feeling that language pinches us somewhere; a hundred times we shall feel the pressure and the insufficiency of our material. It



was the knowledge of this which was in the mind of the poet when he wrote :

arum kann der lebendige Geist dem Geist nicht  
erscheinen ?  
pricht die Seele, so spricht, ach ! schon die Seele  
nicht mehr."

Every one who has something of his own to say feels the oppression, feels the conflict between two forces, the impulse within him, and the force of language. The writer wishes to make himself understood, and must not therefore depart too far from the established usage ; he must make use of the existing language material. But, on the other hand, he wishes to struggle through to the expression of his own intimate and personal thought, and to this end he must wrestle with that established usage, and adapt it to his own ends. He must even, within the limits of intelligibility recreate for his own purposes. The writer who succeeds in finding the means of expression, of full expression, whether by using only the existing material or by adding to it or modifying it, is the stylist.

When a writer has succeeded in putting his thoughts into words, and when he is satisfied that the words convey exactly what he wishes to say, he has overcome the greatest difficulties of style. But his troubles do not end here. When he has found his words, he must still ask himself if they are such as to give a uniform and harmonious effect. Every good piece of writing has a certain consistency with itself, which contributes to no slight extent to the general effect. Unity of tone is nothing more than consistency in the manner of writing. There is nothing so disconcerting

as a piece of composition which passes without reason from one style of writing to another, from the light and colloquial style to the heavy and dignified, or from the serious to the comic. Not that styles should never be mixed; for in some cases the subject absolutely demands such change in the manner of writing. The drama, for example, may contain elements both of tragedy and of comedy; the novel must necessarily pass from the descriptive to the narrative style, and may call for colloquial, expository, or argumentative passages. Where there is no absolute uniformity in the subject-matter there can, of course, be no uniformity of style in writing. Uniformity of tone is not opposed to variety, but only to inconsistency under identical conditions. It depends partly on the subject-matter and partly on the audience. By uniformity of tone is meant not only that the tone should be the same so long as the subject-matter is the same, but also that it should be the one most appropriate to the occasion. The most familiar example of inappropriateness of tone is to be seen in the man who "talks like a book." It is not that there is anything absolutely wrong in talking like a book, but only that there are once and for all conventions which govern our manner of speaking in ordinary conversation. We may, if we please, "speak like a book," but if we do so we run the risk of being ridiculed. In the same way it offends our sense of propriety if, on a solemn occasion, such as on the delivery of a sermon, or any formal address, the language of everyday conversation is used. The only general principle which can be set up in this respect is that the style should match the occasion.

Really, the character of the audience determines the character of the style. Nobody in his senses would attempt to speak to, or write for, children in the same language as he would use to a learned society; nor would a lawyer or a doctor address the layman in the same terms as he would address the members of his own profession. But, looked at from another point of view, it is not so much the audience which determines the style as the thought. For what one wishes to say to the child is not the same as what one wishes to say to the learned society, and what the doctor wishes to say to the layman is not the same as what he would wish to say to his fellow-practitioners. This consideration brings us face to face with the problem of the relation of matter to form. It is sometimes thought that the two are so entirely distinct that, once a writer has thought out what he is going to say, he can then proceed to dress up his thoughts in any style of language he chooses. This is, of course, an entirely wrong view of the matter. A writer can no more change the dress of a thought and leave the thought the same than he can change his skin. When a writer conceives an idea, or, at any rate, when he works it out clearly in his own mind, he conceives it in words, and to change one single word is the same thing as to change the thought. The same thought cannot exist in two forms of words. A sentence may, of course, be polished up and revised, but it is really the thought which is polished and made more clear and expressive, and not the words. A thought which can be expressed can only be expressed in words; the words are the thought, and can have only one invariable expression—one style. A clear

style, therefore, is the reflectic a clear head. So soon as we know exactly what we want to say, there can be no difficulty in saying it ; for the fact that we do know implies that we have already in our minds reduced the thought to words. The thought and the words are therefore identical, and good style without good matter is impossible.

## CHAPTER II

### COMPOSITION

COMPOSITION is mainly the ordering and arrangement of thought with a view to rendering it clear and intelligible. We write in order to convey our thoughts to others, because we have something to say which we believe to be of interest to them. We also write in the hope that those others will read what we have to say to them. Hence there are two points of view in all writing, that of the writer and that of the reader. The balance of the claims of the writer and of the reader must largely determine the principles of composition, just as we have seen that it determines the principles of style. The aim of the writer, considered by himself and independently of the reader, is to give faithful expression to the thought which is within him. From the point of view of the reader, on the other hand, the important thing about all writing is that it should be clear and interesting. The reader does not inquire whether what the writer writes is an adequate or a faithful expression of what was in his mind. He cannot possibly know whether it is that or not; all he cares about is whether that which is placed before him to read is in itself complete, appropriate, and clear. These

are the minimum qualities which will induce him to read any piece of composition. The liberties of the writer are therefore restricted to this extent—he must be clear and he must be interesting. These are restrictions which naturally arise from the double nature of writing: that it must be read as well as written.

To the writer, on the other hand, clearness and interest are not the main thing. The writer, having his thoughts in his own mind, finds them interesting enough, and the clearness which he seeks is an absolute one, and not merely relative; as is the clearness required by the reader. The law of art to the writer is to be faithful to his subject-matter and to himself. A writer may very well compose sentences and paragraphs which are perfectly clear, and even interesting, but which still do not do justice to the thoughts in his mind. His task is to analyse his thoughts, to resolve them into their elements, to examine their relations and associations, and then to find the right words and phrases to convey or to suggest them. He must first think and then wrestle with his material until he is satisfied that he has achieved the desired result. So far as the public is concerned, any one of the numerous possible results will do, if only it is clear and interesting; but so far as the writer is concerned, only that result will do which gives a faithful rendering of his thought.

There are therefore three elements in composition: the thought, the medium, and the audience. The translation of thought into language yields style. But clearness, the demand of the audience, though it is an element of style, may to a very large extent be achieved by attention to the rules of grammar and

logic. Interest, on the other hand, the second demand of the reader, is also a quality of style, having its source in the imagination of the writer. In the present section clearness and the various aids to clearness will be discussed in a general way; further discussion being reserved for the separate sections on the paragraph, the sentence, words, etc.

Clearness in writing is best secured by careful attention to plan and arrangement, whether of the whole composition or of the smaller units. The reader's demand for clearness springs, unlike his demand for interest, from the mind. It is an intellectual quality, and is therefore of the greatest importance in those kinds of composition which make their appeal to the reason rather than to the imagination. So true is this, that in some cases clearness is the only quality which is in any way appropriate; any introduction of an emotional or imaginative appeal would strike the reader immediately as incongruous. A business letter, or the regulations of a club, or an Act of Parliament, need only be clear and free from ambiguity in order to satisfy the reader of such documents. Their only interest is to be found in the elementary fact that they are necessary. In a less degree very much the same may be said of other kinds of composition, as, for example, textbooks, though these, it is true, allow of many degrees of interest in the method of treatment. But even when we come to the higher forms of literature, there still remain certain forms of composition which make their appeal principally to the reason, rather than to the emotions or to the imagination. It is obvious that such writing requires clearness more than any other quality.

It seems unnecessary to say that in order to be clear to others we must first of all be clear to ourselves. But yet it appears often enough in the essays of novices that they have not made clear to themselves what they are writing about; they wander from point to point and never arrive anywhere. They have not defined beforehand either their point of view or the range of their subject. The obvious corrective to this sort of thing is to map out the ground beforehand, to survey it from all possible points of view, and then to make a choice and adhere to it. Equally important is the careful proportioning of the subject-matter to the available space; for if this precaution is omitted, one of three things must happen: the writer will be obliged to stop before the subject is exhausted, and thus leave a feeling of incompleteness; or he will be obliged to condense some of his matter at the risk of spoiling the unity and proportion of the whole; or he will have to condense the whole of the material at the risk of obscurity.

Perhaps the best preventive against the general lack of clearness is the careful choice of a title. There are few things so distressing to the reader as the essay—with a vague general title, which might cover anything—which consists of a number of disjointed, scrappy paragraphs, each introducing a new point of view, or some new and entirely unrelated matter. The result is always a piece of patchwork, leading nowhere and possessing neither unity nor coherence. Each of the separate paragraphs may perhaps have its own unity, and may deal with some phase of the subject announced, but collectively they have none. A



well-chosen title, defining the scope of the essay, would obviate all this, for it would serve as a guide or test to which the contents of each separate paragraph might be referred. For example, under the vague title "Liberty" might be introduced a great many points of view—certainly too many to be treated in an essay of any ordinary length. Such a title leaves room for all sorts of irrelevancies, and loose, unrelated thinking. But a qualification of this title, say "Liberty before the Law," would hold the writer to the central theme of the essay, and would exclude much of the digression which might have crept in under the more comprehensive and less exact title.

Scarcely less important than a proper limitation of the subject is the proper proportioning of the parts. Few faults are so common in the essays of beginners as an imperfect sense of proportion. They will start at random, and then veer to every chance breeze which comes along; then they will run before it as long as it lasts. If they chance upon a detail which has some special interest for them, or of which they have some special knowledge, they will not leave it until they have exhausted every one of its possibilities. The temptation to dwell at length on those details which are in themselves interesting, though not relatively of importance, is so strong that novices can seldom exercise restraint in the treatment of them. This form of excess has many inconveniences. In the first place, it has a tendency to put the emphasis in the wrong place; for emphasis does not depend only on position, as in the paragraph and sentence, but also on mass. We naturally attach more importance to that part of a composition which

is more fully and completely developed than the rest. That which takes up most space is presumably that which the writer thinks ought to be made most clear, and hence fullness of treatment is one of the means of emphasising a particular part of a subject. Overdevelopment of subordinate details thus gives them more prominence than their importance merits. Another inconvenience of the same mismanagement of detail is that the emphasis which is thus wrongly placed on a detail is withdrawn from the main theme, and weakens it to a corresponding extent. Lack of proportion, then, is principally harmful because it gives the reader a wrong idea of the relative importance of the facts, and presses into the background matter which should be made prominent. The moral of all this is that the beginner should always decide beforehand which part of his subject is the most significant, and should take due care that that significance is not in any way dimmed by any details or digressions, however interesting these may be in themselves. The main theme should always have the most space, and any encroachment on its space should be resisted.

Limitation of subject and proper proportion are the means of securing what all good composition must have—unity. A composition has unity when it contains neither more nor less than is necessary for the presentation of the subject, and when every part clearly helps that presentation. The commonest violations of unity are due, therefore, either to excess or to insufficiency of matter. The former mars our impression by telling us too much; the latter mars it by telling us too little. The presence of irrelevant

details, or the over-development of relevant ones, unnecessary digressions and interpolations—in fact, anything which does not contribute to the main impression or argument—takes away from the reader's attention, prevents him from seeing things in their true perspective, blurs the outlines, and thus violates the unity of the whole composition. On the other hand, the omission of any essential point, the insufficient presentation of a significant detail or argument, will leave the reader with an imperfect and incomplete impression, and will produce in him a feeling of faulty structure. He will feel that somewhere there is a gap which should be bridged, or a bridge which should be strengthened.

Unity, at bottom, is only another name for harmony and completeness. It enables the reader to feel a composition as a whole; it gives him a point of view from which he can survey the whole, and from which he can discern whither the composition tends. If a composition has no unity, it makes no clear impression, but leaves the reader rather with a number of detached facts of which he does not quite see the connection, though he feels that somewhere there is one. This desire to know the connection of things is one which, the world over, is crying out for satisfaction. It lies at the bottom of all the sciences as well as at the bottom of all the arts. Man ever seeks to know the whole of the nature of things, the why and the wherefore. The whole of his science is based on the assumption—for which there is no absolute justification in experience—that there is order and unity amidst all the confusion of this world. Even religion is another form of the same demand to see all things explained and unified,

to find a first cause and to refer everything to it. So also a large part of literary criticism is devoted to the exposition of the fundamental unity of the work of our great writers. It extracts from their works their philosophy of life, and shows that all the parts of that work are in accordance with some fundamental principle of their nature. It compares and correlates; it adjusts each part of a writer's work to its proper place, and its aim is to point out to the reader that a writer's work is all of a piece. Thus, to take a particular example, the greater part of the literature on Hamlet is an attempt to see Hamlet as a consistent character, with its own unity of conception. It aims at giving the reader a point of view from which all the sides of that character will appear parts of a complete and consistent whole. All this mass of criticism is, then, an eloquent testimony to man's desire for unity, to his desire to see things as a whole, without any irrelevancies or inconsistencies. The only corrective for lack of unity is careful planning and the power of self-repression. By bearing in mind the scope and purpose of a composition, and by care that nothing that is outside its scope is admitted, the unity of the whole may be preserved. Each paragraph, each sentence, may be referred back to the title or to the general plan, and its relevance tested.

Besides having unity, every composition should also have coherence. Coherence in details will be discussed later, in the section on paragraphs. Here we are concerned more with the coherence of a composition as a whole. Coherence in a composition implies some sort of order and plan. The parts should be arranged in such a way that it is easy for the reader to see what the

writer's intention and what the trend of the composition is. He must be made to feel that he progresses from one point to another, towards some definite end. Perhaps the best illustration of incoherence is to be found in ordinary verbal discussion, when one speaker says to the other, "I don't follow you." The cause of the difficulty is always the same: either the argument, or the narrative, or whatever else may be in question, has not been presented straightforwardly; it has been interrupted by some digression, by some details the connection of which has not been made clear, or else some necessary stage of the development has been omitted, thus rendering the whole unclear. Another instance of the incoherence which arises from the inability of the speaker to keep to the subject, and to explain things in an orderly manner, is the garrulous old woman who interrupts her story a dozen times to tell you how and why she knows this and that, and what she was doing at the time it happened; and so on. In her case, as in many others, the real source of the incoherence is the sudden and unannounced change of point of view.

Coherence, then, is mainly a matter of arrangement. It has no laws, for every composition requires its own particular arrangement: what would be a good order in one case would be a bad one in another. Nevertheless there are a number of well-marked types of procedure which help to make a composition more lucid and easy to follow, and which will well repay a little attention. In the first place, in every composition there are certain main divisions of the material. The subject must be introduced, it must be developed, and it must

be closed. There is a beginning, a middle, and an end. But since it is of the nature of all composition that it is a progression from one point to another, it follows that the beginning must lead to the middle and the middle to the end. The beginning, then, should introduce the subject in such a way that it is easy to pass on to the middle, and the middle should be so framed as to pass naturally into the conclusion. First of all a starting-point has to be found, some common ground has to be selected, from which both reader and writer may set out on their journey. The kinds of introduction are of course very numerous, and they vary according to the nature of the composition. A story may open with an indication of the scene, or with the presentation of the characters, or with a brief account of their lives up to the moment when the story begins. Some writers prefer to begin with a lengthy description of the circumstances which led up to the events to be narrated; others prefer the dramatic opening, and commence with a dialogue. Similarly there are many possible openings for an essay. Some open with a definition of the terms of the title; others begin with a brief statement of the writer's intention. All that is absolutely necessary is that the subject should be definitely introduced, and in such a manner that the reader cannot possibly have any doubt as to what the writer is really about.

There are several kinds of openings which do all this. One opening, which was much more in favour formerly than it is now, is by quotation, followed by an application of the quotation to the matter in hand. Another is the already mentioned opening by definition

of terms, a type of introduction which is very common in essays or books of an argumentative, expository, or philosophical kind. In larger treatises and books a very common method of introduction is to define the nature of the subject treated, and to point out its relation to other kindred subjects or to other branches of the same subject. These and many more will be found in the essays and novels of good writers, and they all have it in common that they definitely announce the writer's intention. The introduction should, as far as possible, endeavour to seize both on the subject and on the reader at the same time. For the sake of illustration, some typical openings are here added :

"Clio was figured by the ancients as the eldest daughter of memory, and chief of the Muses ; which dignity, whether we regard the essential qualities of her art, or its practice and acceptance among men, we shall find to have been fitly bestowed. History, as it lies at the root of all science, is also the first distinct product of man's spiritual nature—his earliest expression of what can be called thought."—Carlyle, *On History*.

"It is hardly necessary for us to say that this is an excellent book excellently translated. . . . The subject of this book has always seemed to us most interesting. How it was that Protestantism did so much, yet did no more, how it was that the Church of Rome, having lost a large part of Europe, not only ceased to lose, but actually regained nearly half of what she had lost, is certainly a curious and most important question ; and on this question Professor Ranke has thrown far

more light than any other person who has written on it."—Macaulay, *Ranke's History of the Popes*.

"The greatest of English poets, it is often said, is but a name. 'No letter of his writing, no record of his conversation, no character of him drawn with any fullness by a contemporary,' have been extracted by antiquaries from the piles of rubbish they have sited. Yet of no person is there a clearer picture in the popular fancy. You seem to have known Shakespeare—to have seen Shakespeare—to have been friends with Shakespeare. We would attempt a slight delineation of the popular idea which has been formed, not from loose tradition or from remote research, not from what some one says some one else said that the poet said, but from the data which are at least undoubted, from the sure testimony of his certain works."—Bagehot, *Shakespeare, The Man*.

"Wishing to address you, Gentlemen, at the commencement of a new session, I tried to find a subject for discussion, which might be at once suitable to the occasion, yet neither too large for your time, nor too minute or abstruse for your attention. I think I see one for my purpose in the very title of your faculty. It is the faculty of Philosophy and Letters. . . . Accordingly I shall select for remark the latter of the two, and attempt to determine what we are to understand by Letters or Literature, in what Literature consists, and how it stands relatively to science."—Newman, *Literature*.

"My first duty this evening is to ask your pardon for the ambiguity of the title under which the subject



of this lecture has been announced: for indeed I am not going to talk of kings, known as regnant, nor of treasures, understood to contain wealth; but of quite another order of royalty, and another material of riches, than those usually acknowledged. . . . I will take the slight mask off at once, and tell you plainly that I want to speak to you about the treasures hidden in books; and about the way we find them, and the way we lose them.”—Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*.

“On an evening in July, in the year 18—, at East D——, a beautiful little town in a certain district in East Anglia, I first saw the light.

“My father was a Cornishman, the youngest, as I have heard him say, of seven brothers,” etc.—Borrow, *Lavengro*.

• “He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to Fortune; for they are impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief.”—Bacon, *Of Marriage and Single Life*.

“A moss rose-bud hiding her face among the leaves one hot summer morning, for fear the sun should injure her complexion, happened to let fall a glance towards her roots, and to see the bed in which she was growing. ‘What a filthy place!’ she cried. ‘What a home they have chosen for me! I, the most beautiful of flowers, fastened down in such a detestable neighbourhood!’ She threw her face into the air, thrust herself into the hands of the first passer-by who stopped to look at her, and escaped in triumph, as she thought, into the centre of a nosegay. But her triumph was short-lived: in a few hours she withered and died.

"I was reminded of this story when hearing a living thinker of some eminence once say that he considered Christianity to have been a misfortune."—Froude, *The Philosophy of Christianity*.

After the introduction the subject has to be developed and expanded. Here, too, there are many ways of progressing, one of the commonest being progression in time. Things happen in some sort of sequence, so that it is natural that they should be presented in the order of their occurrence, unless there is some special reason for departing from that order. The particular kind of composition to which this form of development is most appropriate is of course narrative. History and fiction alike lend themselves to it, though even in these other methods are possible, and, on occasion, equally good. A common variety of progression in chronological order is to be found both in history and in fiction, where the writer has several parallel stories or different phases of the same subject to develop. In such cases he may be obliged to separate the various elements of the narrative and to advance each in turn up to a certain point, and then return to the others to resume the broken thread. Obviously, too, this method of progression is limited to those forms of composition in which action plays the principal role, in which things do happen in succession. The order selected, again, will vary with the subject and with the manner of treatment. In some cases the most suitable plan may be to begin with the earliest, and to lead on to the latest event; in others the reverse order may be better; and in yet another case a combination of the two methods may be best. The only

ruling principle is that the order selected, whichever it may be, should be the one which is most conducive to clearness and to the coherent development of the story.

Those facts which are not primarily related in time, or in which the temporal relation is not the most important one, or in which it does not require any special emphasis laid upon it, may be more suitably arranged on some other basis. So, for example, they may be presented with reference to their position. Most descriptive work is naturally of this kind. But just as there are variations required by the subject, in the presentation in chronological order, so also there are variations required by the subject in the position order. A description of a landscape may be made from the point of view of one looking down at the landscape from an eminence, or from the point of view of one driving through it in a motor-car. The latter will describe objects in the order which they come to him; the former will describe, according to some plan, the relative position of objects, the most conspicuous features of the landscape, irrespective of position. Or the description may vary according to the person who gives the description. The geologist would not describe either the same objects, or in the same order, as the botanist. So, too, the description of a room given by an auctioneer and by a novelist would not be the same, for each has a different object in view. The one wishes to give a catalogue, and the other wishes to give a general description of the room rather than an accurate enumeration of the objects in it. In several of the above examples the real cause of the difference of treatment, and of the

difference in the manner of presentation, is in the selection of the details, and this selection, in its turn, depends on the purpose of the writer. This may well be shown from the following passage from Dickens :

“A little shop, quite crammed and choked with the abundance of its stock ; a perfectly voracious little shop, with a maw as accommodating and full as any shark’s. Cheese, butter, soap, firewood, pickles, matches, bacon, table-beer, peg-tops, sweet-meats, toys, kites, bird-seed, cold ham, birch brooms, hearth-stone, salt, vinegar, blacking, red herrings, stationery, lard, mushroom ketchup, stay-laces, loaves of bread, shuttlecocks, eggs, and slate-pencils : everything was fish that came to the net of this greedy little shop, and all these articles were in its net. How many other kinds of petty merchandise were there it is hard to say ; but balls of thread, ropes of onions, pounds of candles cabbage-nets, and brushes, hung in bunches from the ceiling, like extraordinary fruit ; while various old canisters, emitting aromatic smells, established the veracity of the inscription over the outer door, which informed the public that the owner of this little shop was a licensed dealer in tea, coffee, tobacco, pepper, and snuff.”

Here there is no order, but rather intentional disorder. The aim of the description is to convey to our minds an impression of a shop, and this it successfully does. The shop is clearly a jumble of a shop ; but if the numerous articles enumerated had been classified into raw and prepared food-stuffs, toys, household articles, etc., this impression would have been lost, and we should have thought rather of some very orderly

shop. This example, then, shows that the order in which the facts are presented must depend, in the first place, on the nature of the composition and on the impression which the writer wishes to create.

The presentation in order of time and place may be yet further complicated by considerations of cause and effect. This latter relation is of course always at the same time a chronological order, but it may very considerably affect the grouping of objects which are related by position. There are, moreover, a vast number of subjects of composition the material of which has no relations either of time, of place, or of cause and effect, and for these some other method of presentation must be found. Such are the great mass of critical and expository subjects, as, for example, the present book. The order of progression in such work is based always on some logical relation, and the number of possible arrangements is only limited by the number of possible logical relations between the several parts of the subject. In most books coming under this head there are several possible arrangements of the material, all of them equally logical, but not all equally advantageous in giving effect to the wishes of the writer. The most common arrangement of the logical kind is that based on some form of classification of the material, by which those thoughts and facts which have a close logical relation are presented together, in the order which seems most natural and conducive to clearness. A commercial geography, for example, may begin with a classification of the industrial centres, irrespective of their position, and proceed to a classification of coalfields, agricultural

centres, and so on. But it would scarcely pass from a description of the cotton-spinning centres to flax-growing, and then back again to the tanning industry. Those facts which are in some way closely related would be taken together.

If the logical basis of progression is that of cause and effect, there are also various methods of procedure. Effects may be mentioned before causes, or causes before effects, whichever order suits the particular purpose of the writer best. His choice may be determined by his desire to emphasise one group of effects more than another; he may wish to explain the present from the past, or the past from the present, or the future from both, and his manner of progression will depend both on this intention and on the nature of his material.

Another logical method of progression is from general to particular, or from particular to general. Either the general statement may be introduced first and be followed by examples and illustrations, or the illustrations may precede and the general statement or the inference from the data follow. This is the arrangement of material usually found in composition of an argumentative character. The details of the arrangement depend, of course, on the aim of the writer. Where he wishes to illustrate the application of a general principle, the natural order is to place the general principle first, and then to proceed to the applications of it. But where, on the other hand, the writer wishes to establish a general principle, the natural order is to lead up to it by the various stages of evidence and proof, and then to state the conclusion which may

be drawn from the evidence. All demonstration and argument tends to follow this plan. Some particular end is kept in view, and all the evidence is accumulated, and presented in such an order that one piece of evidence is related to, or grows out of another, until the proof, or the argument, is completely unfolded. Similar in purpose, though somewhat different in kind, is the arrangement of the material with a view to creating a certain impression or mood. Here, as in the example quoted above, the material is first selected in accordance with its fitness for producing the desired impression or mood, those elements which will make an appeal to the imagination are combined, and the whole is so presented that each part helps to create the desired impression.

Yet another common method of grouping the material is that of juxtaposition and contrast. This method is usually followed where the subject is one which is best illustrated by analogy, contrast, or comparison. Sometimes we may know better what a thing is by knowing what it is not. Some things we may understand better by understanding their resemblance to other and more familiar things. In such cases development by analogy, contrast, or juxtaposition may prove useful, either by itself or in combination with any of the other methods mentioned.

Coherence, then, is mainly a matter of classification and arrangement, with a view to an orderly and clear development of the subject. Any manner of progression which makes quite clear the writer's intention, and which at the same time is easy for the reader both to understand and to follow, is good, whether it be

progression in the order of time, place, cause and effect, or in any other of the ways mentioned. That the manner of progression may be largely determined by the nature of the composition, and by the writer's purpose, has been seen already ; but it may also be determined by the character of the audience, for the manner which might be quite clear to one audience would not be clear to another.

Perhaps the best means of studying coherence in writing is to read the works of good writers and to pay special attention to the way in which they develop their subject-matter. A very little observation will show that the method of the novelist differs from that of the historian, and that both differ in their methods from those of the scientist or the essayist. All will show, too, numerous varieties of a single type of development.

The middle of a composition leads on to the end, which, as a general rule, should bring the reader back to a state of rest. If it does not do this, the composition lacks unity, it is not rounded off, and leaves the reader with a feeling that something is missing. The nature of the close of a composition is often fixed by the middle, just in the same way as the middle is moulded by the beginning. Whether the composition be a novel, in which an unstable position achieves equilibrium and complications are resolved, or an essay, in which the purpose announced at the outset is fulfilled, or an argument or demonstration, where the proof is given—in all alike the reader is brought back to a position of rest. He feels that nothing has been omitted, that there is nothing more to come. Here, as in the



case of openings, a study of the conclusions of some good writers will reveal more than any amount of theoretical exposition, so that for this reason we append the concluding sentences of the works of which the openings are given above :—

“In this manner, though, as above remarked, all action is extended in three ways, and the general sum of human action is a whole universe, with all limits of it unknown, does History strive, by running path after path, through the Impassable, in manifold directions and intersections, to secure for us some oversight over the Whole; in which endeavour, if each Historian will look well around him from his path, tracking it out with the eye, and not, as is more common, with the nose, she may at last prove not altogether unsuccessful. Praying only that increased division of labour do not here, as elsewhere, aggravate our already strong Mechanical tendencies, so that in the manual dexterity for parts we lose all command over the whole, and the hope of any Philosophy of History be farther off than ever,—let us all wish here great and greater success.”—Carlyle, *On History*.

“Here we close this hasty sketch of one of the most important chapters on the history of mankind. Our readers will have great reason to feel obliged to us if we have interested them sufficiently to induce them to peruse Professor Ranke’s book.”—Macaulay, *Ranke’s History of the Popes*.

“We seem to see him eyeing the burghesses with good-humoured fellowship and genial (though suppressed and half-unconscious) contempt, drawing out their old

stories, and acquiescing in their foolish notions, with everything in his head and easy sayings upon his tongue, —a full mind and a deep dark eye, that played upon an easy scene—now in fanciful solitude, now in cheerful society; now, occupied with deep thoughts, now, and equally so, with trivial recreations, forgetting the dramatist in the man of substance, and the poet in the happy companion; beloved and even respected, with a hope for everyone and a smile for all.”—Bagehot, *Shakespeare, The Man*.

The concluding paragraph of Newman's essay on *Literature* is printed on page 56.

As a last example may be quoted the closing lines of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

“The historian may applaud the importance and variety of his subject; but, while he is conscious of his own imperfections, he must often accuse the inefficiency of his materials. It was among the ruins of the Capitol that I first conceived the idea of a work which has amused and exercised near twenty years of my life, and which, however inadequate to my wishes, I finally deliver to the curiosity and candour of the public.”

## CHAPTER III

### PARAGRAPHS

A KNOWLEDGE of the nature of the paragraph, as a unit of composition, is perhaps the most useful of all aids to clearness in writing, though the proper use of the paragraph is not advantageous for this purpose alone. We propose, therefore, in this section, to point out some of the principles, of more or less general application, of paragraph division. It is not to be imagined, of course, that there are any hard-and-fast laws of paragraph division, paragraph structure, and paragraph sequence. The determination of these latter must, in the last resort, depend on the impression which the writer wishes to create; but nevertheless, subject to this important reservation, there are certain principles which are almost always observed.

Paragraphs may be considered from many points of view. We may consider them, and we propose so to consider them in the present section, from the point of view (1) of their function; (2) of their nature, and of the characteristics by which they are enabled to perform those functions; (3) of the various kinds of paragraphs, adapted to serve the special ends of special functions; under this head may be mentioned

introductory, concluding, and transitional paragraphs ; (4) of the relation of one paragraph to another, and the sequence of paragraphs ; (5) of the structure of the single paragraph ; and (6) of the length of paragraphs.

### The Function of the Paragraph

The external and visible mark of the paragraph is the beginning of a new line, with a slight indentation from the normal margin. This simple typographical device is the counterpart in the written language of the pauses we make in the spoken language, or, to be more exact, of the pauses in the language of set speeches, sermons, lectures, and so on. In ordinary conversation we do not, of course, speak in paragraphs, for the simple reason that we are usually interrupted, or else we finish what we have to say within the limits of what would be a single paragraph. The function of the pause, as of the new paragraph with its external mark of indentation, is to give both writer and reader a rest, to give them a moment of time in which to reflect, and to survey what has been written. This moment of reflection enables the reader to see where he is being led, and to gain an idea of the general trend of the argument, narrative, exposition, or whatever else may be the subject-matter of the piece. He sees that he is being led forward by definitely marked stages, each one of which he feels to be an advance in the movement.

Paragraphs, therefore, are essential to the movement of a composition, and this is perhaps their most important function. By forming convenient finger-posts along the route, especially where the road has many turnings, or where the country is difficult, they enable

the traveller to advance without any fear of losing his way, and with the knowledge that he can, if necessary, retrace his steps. By their help he knows not only whither he is going, but also whence he comes. There are, of course, many kinds of paragraphs, just as there are many kinds of finger-posts, some with lettering defaced or obliterated; but nevertheless all good paragraphs lead one forward. Whether they introduce a new incident in a narrative, describe a new function in an exposition, or add an illustration to an argument, in any case they add something, and cause the whole of the composition to advance to that extent.

But the function of the paragraph is not only to advance the movement, but also to make it clear to the reader how and whither the advance is made. Paragraphs, if well constructed, form, as it were, the pattern of the piece, and form certain clear outlines by which on a broad survey the reader is enabled to see the relation of one part to another, and to gain a comprehensive view of the whole. There is, indeed, some relation between the manner of printing paragraphs in an essay or in a chapter and the manner of printing, in some editions, of the propositions of Euclid. In these latter we sometimes find that each stage in the development of the proof is printed in paragraph form :

$$\begin{aligned} \therefore AB &= CD \text{ and } XY = AB \\ \therefore XY &= CD. \end{aligned}$$

By printing in this way the reader is made to feel that each step in the unfolding of the proof constitutes a separate and independent link in the chain of evidence, and by presenting it in this detached way it gains in

significance and in force. The simple device of printing in paragraph form detaches, in the mind of the reader, each step from the rest, and forces him to recognise its separate existence and its particular function and place in the argument as a whole. Another instance of the value of the spacing in paragraph divisions is to be found in the modern theatre posters. Formerly these were covered with a mass of lettering of different sizes and of different colours, and were crowded with a mass of details. In addition to the things one wished to see, and which one could not see owing to the confusion of irrelevant details, we were told the name of the stage-manager, of the business-manager, of the firm who lent certain "properties," of the firm who designed and provided the dresses, and much more of the like. More recently this has all been changed. It has been felt that theatre posters, like all other kinds of composition, must follow certain elementary principles if they are to be intelligible to the reading public, and in consequence it is now possible to see in the theatre poster what one wishes to see, without first having to disengage it from the mass of irrelevant details by which it was formerly obscured. The important things—the name of the theatre, the name of the piece, and the date when the piece is to be produced—occupy a prominent place on the poster, and stand out distinctly, in much the same way as a paragraph stands out beside his fellows.

The paragraph, however, has another function than that of helping to advance the movement and to give perspective: it is also a valuable means of giving emphasis to a particular thought or to a particular

part of the subject. This it may do in several ways. The mere fact that a paragraph is a sort of enclosure marking off a certain well-defined territory, is sufficient to attract the attention, since all that is within the enclosure is presented to the mind as a complete unit, and is to that extent more noticeable—more emphatic—than it could possibly be if it were merged in a mass of other detail. The fact that a paragraph stands out clear and distinct from its context is therefore one source of emphasis, even though in this sense all paragraphs are equally emphatic. On the other hand, a particular paragraph may be rendered specially emphatic—more emphatic than its neighbours; and this is a peculiarity not of all paragraphs, but of some specially selected ones. It is therefore a special rather than a general function.

In this sense a paragraph may be emphatic either by its structure or by its position. It is emphatic by structure in various ways, in all of which the emphasis is due to the fact that the structure of the paragraph is in some way unusual. Thus, for example, a short paragraph following a series of long ones tends, by force of contrast, to gain in emphasis. In his essay on *Ranke's History of the Popes*, Macaulay, after a series of long paragraphs descriptive of the policy of the Church of Rome, introduces the following paragraph, consisting of a single sentence—a paragraph which, by reason of its shortness, becomes especially emphatic:

“We have dwelt long on this subject, because we believe that, of the many causes to which the Church of Rome owed her safety and her triumph at the close of the sixteenth century, the chief was the profound

policy with which she used the fanaticism of such persons as St. Ignatius and St. Teresa."

In this paragraph, any special emphasis it possesses is derived partly from its brevity, especially in contrast to the length of the preceding paragraphs, though partly, as we shall see shortly, it is derived from its position. But brevity is not the only structural means of imparting emphasis to a paragraph, for just as a short paragraph amidst long ones tends to be emphatic, so also a long paragraph amidst shorter ones tends to be so. It is, indeed, only natural that that which the author develops most fully should carry greater weight, and be, on that account, more emphatic. It follows, moreover, as a corollary to this, that whatever is not of special significance should not be developed at undue length, since this would distract attention from the more to the less important matter.

We have said that the special emphasis of the above paragraph is derived partly from its structure, and partly also from its position. It owes this position-emphasis to the fact that it is a brief and concise summary of the arguments which had preceded it; it is thus a climax, and, as such, emphatic. The same paragraph with a slight change of tense in the principal verb might also have preceded those arguments and still have retained the emphasis which it derives from its brevity, though it would lose much of the emphasis which belongs to it by virtue of its position at the end of a series of arguments. In much the same way an introductory paragraph may be emphatic both by position and by brevity: the former because it introduces the subject of the composition, and the latter



because it specially calls the attention of the reader to the fact that a new phase of the subject is about to be treated. Similarly a concluding paragraph may be emphatic, especially when the opportunity is seized to summarise and drive home the various points of the body of the essay. Thus Newman, in his essay on *Literature*, presses into his concluding paragraph all the conclusions he has arrived at in the course of the essay :

“If, then, the power of speech is a gift as great as any that can be named,—if the origin of language is by many philosophers even considered to be nothing short of divine,—if by means of words the secrets of the heart are brought to light, pain of soul is relieved, hidden grief is carried off, sympathy conveyed, counsel imparted, and wisdom perpetuated,—if by great authors the many are drawn up into unity, national character is fixed, a people speaks, the past and the future, the East and the West, are brought into communication with each other,—if such men are, in a word, the spokesmen and prophets of the human family,—it will not answer to make light of literature or to neglect its study; rather we may be sure that, in proportion as we master it, in whatever language, and imbibe its spirit, we shall ourselves become in our own measure the ministers of like benefits to others, be they many or few, be they in the obscurer or the more distinguished walks of life,—who are united to us by social ties, and are within the sphere of our personal influence.”

### The Nature of the Paragraph

The second point of view from which we may regard the paragraph is that of its characteristics. We have

to ask ourselves not only what its functions are, but also what it is in itself. This question has already been answered, in part, in the discussion of the function of the paragraph. If it is the function of the paragraph to assist in the movement of a composition, it follows that the paragraph must be so constructed as to make it clear to the reader that the movement is progressing. How it can do this can perhaps best be seen by an examination of our experience as readers. If we ask ourselves how it is that it would be difficult to read a book or an essay which had neither chapter nor paragraph division, we should soon discover that it was because the subject-matter was not presented to our minds in a manner in which we could readily assimilate it. In reading a book, as in travelling along a road, we must, if we are to be conscious of any progress, be able to perceive definite marks, of that progress; we must consciously proceed from one point to another. Progress along a road is marked by the objects of nature, or by the change of view. Our memory of such progress is made up of pictures or impressions of certain stages of the journey. Very much the same thing may be said of our progress through a book. Here also we proceed from point to point, from view to view, and the advance is marked by the paragraph, the section and the chapter. The paragraph, then, should present just so much of the matter as may be taken in at a single glance, as may be included in a single survey. Should it contain more than this, it must fail of its purpose, and can only confuse the reader rather than illumine him.

A paragraph, then, contains just so much of an

argument, exposition, narrative or description as may conveniently be assimilated at once. In other words, it should have unity. Precisely to state what unity is is not possible, for it is not the same to all people. This may be well illustrated by a comparison drawn from other fields of observation. If, for example, we imagine ourselves standing on some mountain top, surveying the country around us, and allow the eye to travel round until it rests on one part of the landscape, the eye can only include a certain limited section of the horizon, and therefore, in glancing round at the country below us, we get a series of pictures, each of which is detached and separate. It is, of course, possible to let the eye travel round the whole horizon, without allowing it to rest for a moment, but if we do this we lose the clearness of impression which we derive from dividing up the landscape into a series of units. Different people will, of course, divide up the landscape in different ways, according to their particular preferences of line and form, but all will remember the scene as a series of separate impressions, each one of which has its own unity and detachment. Quite similar is the unity of the paragraph. We can read a composition without pausing, just as we may allow the eye to travel round the horizon; but if we wish to have a clear impression of what we read, we must be able to split it up into sections, each one of which we may survey and understand separately, each one of which is a complete picture. Opinions may differ as to how much should be put into the picture, though there can be no doubt that there must be a picture, and that it must have some kind of unity. Unity, then, is the first necessity of a

good paragraph. Perhaps the best proof of this is to be found in the examination of some of the paragraphs of good writers, and for this purpose we propose to add here the full text of one of the shorter essays from *The Spectator*, in order to analyse it from this point of view. The essay selected for this purpose is the one on "Cheerfulness."

### *On Cheerfulness*

"I have always preferred cheerfulness to mirth. The latter I consider as an act, the former as a habit of mind. Mirth is short and transient, cheerfulness fixed and permanent. Those are often raised into the greatest transports of mirth who are subject to the greatest depressions of melancholy. On the contrary, cheerfulness, though it does not give the mind such an exquisite gladness, prevents us from falling into any depths of sorrow. Mirth is like a flash of lightning, that breaks through a gloom of clouds, and glitters for a moment; cheerfulness keeps up a kind of daylight in the mind, and fills it with a sort of steady and permanent serenity.

"Men of austere principles look upon mirth as too wanton and dissolute for a state of probation, and as filled with a certain triumph and insolence of heart that is inconsistent with a life which is at every moment obnoxious to the greatest dangers. Writers of this complexion have observed that the sacred person who was the great pattern of perfection was never seen to laugh.

• "Cheerfulness of mind is not liable to any of these exceptions; it is of a serious and composed nature; it does not throw the mind into a condition improper

to the present state of humanity, and is very conspicuous in the characters of those who are looked upon as the greatest philosophers among the heathen, as well as among those who have been deservedly esteemed as saints and holy men among Christians.

“If we consider cheerfulness in three lights—with regard to ourselves, to those we converse with, and to the great Author of our being—it will not a little recommend itself on each of these accounts. The man who is possessed of this excelling frame of mind is not only easy in his thoughts, but a perfect master of all the powers and faculties of his soul. His imagination is always clear, and his judgment undisturbed; his temper is even and unruffled, whether in action or in solitude. He comes with relish to all those goods which nature has provided for him, tastes all the pleasures of the creation which are poured about him, and does not feel the full weight of those accidental evils which may befall him.

“When I consider this cheerful state of mind in its third relation, I cannot but look upon it as a constant habitual gratitude to the great Author of nature. An inward cheerfulness is an implicit praise and thanksgiving to Providence under all its dispensations. It is a kind of acquiescence in the state wherein we are placed, and a secret approbation of the Divine Will in his conduct towards man.

“There are but two things which, in my opinion, can reasonably deprive us of this cheerfulness of heart. The first of these is the sense of guilt. A man who lives in a state of vice and impenitence can have no title to that evenness and tranquillity of mind which

is the health of the soul, and the natural effect of virtue and innocence. Cheerfulness in an ill man deserves a harder name than language can furnish us with, and is many degrees beyond what we commonly call folly or madness.\*

"Atheism, by which I mean a disbelief of a Supreme Being, and consequently of a future state, under whatever title it shelters itself, may likewise very reasonably deprive a man of this cheerfulness of temper. There is something so particularly gloomy and offensive to human nature in the prospect of non-existence, that I cannot but wonder, with many excellent writers, how it is possible for a man to outlive the expectation of it. For my own part, I think the Being of a God is so little to be doubted, that it is almost the only truth we are sure of; and such a truth as we meet with in every object, in every occurrence, and in every thought. If we look into the characters of this tribe of inndels, we generally find that they are made up of pride, spleen, and cavil. It is indeed no wonder, that men who are so uneasy to themselves should be so to the rest of the world; and how is it possible for a man to be otherwise than uneasy in himself, who is in danger every moment of losing his entire existence, and dropping into nothing?

"The vicious man and the Atheist have therefore no pretence to cheerfulness, and would act very unreasonably should they endeavour after it. It is impossible for any one to live in good humour and enjoy his present existence, who is apprehensive either of torment or of annihilation; of being miserable, or of not being at all.

"After having mentioned these two great principles, which are destructive of cheerfulness in their own nature, as well as in right reason, I cannot think of any other that ought to banish this happy temper from a virtuous mind. Pain and sickness, shame and reproach, poverty and old age—nay, death itself—considering the shortness of their duration and the advantage we reap from them, do not deserve the name of evils. A good mind may bear up under them with fortitude, with indolence, and with cheerfulness of heart. The tossing of a tempest does not discompose him, which he is sure will bring him to a joyful harbour.

"A man who uses his best endeavour to live according to the dictates of virtue and right reason, has two perpetual sources of cheerfulness, in the consideration of his own nature, and of that Being upon whom he has a dependance. If he looks into himself he cannot but rejoice in that existence which is so lately bestowed upon him, and which, after millions of ages, will be still new, and still in its beginning. How many self-congratulations naturally arise in the mind, when it reflects on this its entrance into eternity, when it takes a view of those improvable faculties, which in a few years, and even at its first setting out, have made so considerable a progress, and which will still be receiving an increase of perfection, and consequently an increase of happiness! The consciousness of such a Being spreads a perpetual diffusion of joy through the soul of a virtuous man, and makes him look upon himself every moment as more happy than he knows how to conceive.

"The second source of cheerfulness to a good mind is the consideration of that Being on whom we have

our dependance, and in whom, though we behold Him as yet but in the first faint discolories of His perfections, we see everything we can imagine as great, glorious, or amiable. We find ourselves everywhere upheld by His goodness, and surrounded with an immensity of love and mercy. In short, we depend upon a Being, whose power qualifies Him to make us happy by an infinity of means, whose goodness and truth engage Him to make those happy who desire it of Him, and whose unchangeableness will secure us in this happiness to all eternity.

“Such considerations, which everyone shou'd perpetually cherish in his thoughts, will banish from us all that secret heaviness of heart which unthinking men are subject to when they lie under no real affliction ; all that anguish which we may feel from any evil that actually oppresses us, to which I may likewise add those little cracklings of mirth and folly that are apter to betray virtue than support it ; and establish in us such an even and cheerful temper, as makes us pleasing to ourselves, to those with whom we converse, and to Him whom we were made to please.”

On reading this essay, it will appear that four main thoughts are developed :

- A. The nature of cheerfulness.
- B. The relations of cheerfulness.
- C. The obstacles to cheerfulness.
- D. The sources of cheerfulness.

These four thoughts form the larger framework of the essay ; they constitute its larger units. Such being the case, the essay might have been written in



four paragraphs, and doubtless some writers would have so written it. Of course, whether or not this should be done depends very much on the length of the essay, and on this point more will have to be said later on. Addison, however, prefers short paragraphs to long ones. It is a feature of his style that it is light and graceful, a feature to which short, vivid paragraphs to no little extent contribute. Hence in the above essay he has divided up his four main units into a number of smaller ones, each of which is developed in a separate paragraph, and each of which has its own unity on a smaller scale. A further analysis of the essay will show the following subdivision of the material :

- (1. Definition of cheerfulness by contrast with mirth.
- A. Nature { 2. Development of the contrast by enlargement on nature of mirth.
3. Development of the contrast by enlargement on nature of cheerfulness.
- B. Relations { 1. { Cheerfulness in relation to ourselves.
2. { Cheerfulness in relation to others.
3. { Cheerfulness in relation to God.
- (1. Guilt as an obstacle to cheerfulness.
2. Atheism as an obstacle to cheerfulness.
- C. Obstacles 3. Summary of 1 and 2.
4. Other obstacles are only apparently such.
- D. Sources { 1. The knowledge of man and of human progress.
2. Reflection on God.
3. Conclusion.

If we now read over once again the paragraphs of the essay, and bear in mind the above schematic representation of its subject-matter, it will be obvious what is meant by the unity of the paragraph. We shall see that in each of them there is developed one main thought and only one. There is not a single sentence in any one of them which does not add something to the development of the central thought; there is not a single sentence which draws away the attention to some extraneous matter. Everywhere there is concentration and a conscious aim; everywhere the writer has clearly before the mind's eye the exact nature of the impression which he wishes to create.

Unity in a paragraph implies, therefore, the development of some one predominant thought and the exclusion of everything which is not closely related to that thought. By this it is not meant, of course, that a paragraph may only contain one thought—that is the function of a sentence—but that it shall contain the development of only one main thought, to which all other thoughts stand in some close and intimate relation. We have seen, for example, that the above essay of Addison might have been written in four paragraphs instead of twelve, and in this case each of the four paragraphs would have contained two or more main thoughts. But then it should be noted that these latter are so closely related that they form together one larger principal thought; that they may be merged in a larger whole, which would in its turn still possess unity. The case would be quite different if, for example, A 3 and B 1, or B 2 and C 1, had been merged into one paragraph; for in that case the two

thoughts are not so intimately related that they can be included under some larger head, or at any rate they cannot be so included in an essay planned on the lines of this one.

In the same way in an essay on Scott, developed on the following lines :

### SCOTT

Life .	Childhood.
	Youth.
	Manhood.
Work	As a poet.
	As a novelist.
Reputation	At home.
	Abroad.

there are several possible ways of paragraphing, depending upon the length of the essay and on other considerations of various kinds. If the writer of the essay intends to give only the bare outlines of Scott's life, and to speak at greater length on his work and reputation he might very properly say all that he wished to say concerning Scott's career in a single paragraph, and devote two paragraphs each to the discussion of his work and his reputation. What he should not do, however, is to write of his later life and of his work as a poet in the same paragraph ; nor should he discuss his work as a novelist and his reputation at home in the same paragraph, for there is not a sufficiently close relation between these aspects of Scott to give unity to a paragraph embracing them both.

Apart from the essential point of unity, a writer will divide his material into as many or as few paragraphs as he chooses. His choice will be limited only by the general principles of all literary art. He will not make them so long that they become fatiguing, nor will he make them so short that they become scrappy and disconnected. He will seek to preserve the harmony and proportion which the nature of the subject and his own intentions impose upon him. Thus, for example, the above essay on Scott, further developed and paragraphed as follows, would evidently betray a poor sense of proportion :

## LIFE AND WORK OF SCOTT

Life . . . . .	1.	{ Childhood. Youth. Manhood.
(As a poet . . .		{ 2. As a lyric poet. 3. As a writer of ballads. 4. As a writer of romances.
Work. }		{ 5. As an interpreter of history.
As a novelist . .		{ 6. As a painter of Scotch life. 7. As a humorist. 8. Merits and defects.
Reputation . . . . .	9.	{ At home. Abroad.

The disproportion arises from the fact that the title leads us to expect the treatment of both his life and work, and we find, instead of this, one paragraph on

his life and seven on his work. A similar error of proportion would be made if the essay were divided as follows :

Life	{ Youth .	1. Childhood.
		2. In the country.
	{ Manhood	3. In Edinburgh.
		4. At Abbotsford.
		5. Last years.
Work	{	As a poet.
		As a novelist.
Reputation.	6. }	
		At home.
		Abroad.

For here we have just the converse of the preceding case, five paragraphs being devoted to his life and only one to his work and reputation. Sometimes the disproportion may be corrected by a change of title, but this is not always possible.

It is not, however, only in expository or argumentative writing that it is possible to secure unity of subject-matter in a paragraph. Narrative and descriptive writing lend themselves just as well to this treatment. More especially is this true of narrative compositions, where the subject-matter naturally resolves itself into a number of separate parts, consisting of the events and incidents which are narrated. In order to show this unity in a composition which is not argumentative, we add here an analysis of Stevenson's *Penny Plain, Twopence Coloured* :

Par. 1 introduces the subject of the Essay—"Skelt's Juvenile Drama,"— mentions the fate of

collection, and gives the titles of some of the plays included in it.

Par. 2 gives the impressions of the shop where they were purchased, and the sensations of the intending purchaser.

Par. 3 gives the impressions after the purchase : joys and disappointments.

Par. 4 describes the joys of colouring some of the scenes.

Par. 5 describes the joys of anticipation in reading the catalogue, printed on the cover of the purchase, of other plays.

Par. 6. Impressions associated with the name of the publisher.

Par. 7. Impressions of the scenery of Skelt.

Par. 8. Conclusion.

The unity which we have discussed up to the present has always had reference to form ; but there is also another kind of unity which lies rather in harmony of treatment, a unity which is perhaps as important as unity of form, though it is not so easy to define in precise terms. The most common cause of a lack of this particular kind of unity is to be found in a shifting of the point of view within the paragraph, just as the lack of unity in form is due to the introduction of irrelevant matter. Both weaknesses are in the nature of a digression, introducing something which is out of harmony with what precedes or follows. For example, a paragraph descriptive of the sensations of an aviator coming down to earth would be lacking in unity of treatment if it contained a sentence describing the

feelings of the spectators who witnessed the descent ; and in the same way, a paragraph describing a game, should not pass at will from the point of view of the spectators to that of the players, and then on to the point of view of the umpire.

### Kinds of Paragraph

In addition to the normal or body paragraph, which serves to develop and advance the theme, there are also other kinds of paragraphs which have more particular functions of their own. The chief of these are, in the order in which they appear in a composition : the introductory paragraph, the transition paragraph, and the concluding paragraph.

Of these the introductory paragraph is the one which seems to present most difficulty. Its function is, as the name implies, to introduce the subject of the essay or chapter, and a great deal depends upon whether this is well or ill done. Indeed, there are few things which can so readily make or mar an essay as a good or faulty initial paragraph. If it is well constructed it will give the reader immediately an idea of what is to follow, and by so doing will help him to form a clear impression of the writer's purpose. On the other hand, if the initial paragraph is in any way a digression or a flourish, if it does not introduce the subject, or if it leads away the attention to phases of the subject which are not to be treated later, it cannot fail to confuse and disappoint the reader. It is perhaps even more likely to do this because it is in a very emphatic position.

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of introductory paragraphs : those that seize immediately on the main

subject-matter and plunge *in medias res*, and those that introduce the subject by defining and limiting it, or by outlining the plan of the writer. The first kind proceeds immediately to the development of the theme, and is usually found in compositions of a narrative or descriptive order, since it is more natural in compositions of this kind that the object or events to be described should be introduced immediately. Thus Stevenson, in the essay analysed on page 68, plunges immediately into his subject as follows :

“These words will be familiar to all students of Skelt’s *Juvenile Drama*. That national monument, after having changed its name to Park’s, to Webb’s, to Redington’s, and last of all to Pollock’s, has now become, for the most part, a memory. Some of its pillars, like Stonehenge, are still afoot, the rest clean vanished. It may be the Museum numbers a full set; and Mr. Ionides, perhaps, or else her gracious Majesty, may boast their great collections; but to the plain private person they are become, like Raphaels, unattainable,” etc. etc.

In the same way George Eliot begins her *Scenes from Clerical Life* by proceeding immediately to the work of description :

“Shepperton Church was a very different looking building five-and-twenty years ago. To be sure its substantial stone tower looks at you through its intelligent eye, the clock, with friendly expression of former days; but in everything else, what changes! Now there is a wide span of slated roof flanking the old steeple; the windows are tall and symmetrical, the outer doors are resplendent with oak graining, the



inner doors reverentially noiseless with a garment of red baize ; and the walls, you are convinced, no lichen will ever again affect a settlement on—they are smooth and innutrient as the summit of the Rev. Amos Barton's head, after ten years of baldness and supererogatory soap. Pass through the baize doors and you will see the nave filled with well-shaped benches, understood to be free seats ; while in certain eligible corners, less directly under the fire of the clergyman's eye, there are pews reserved for the Shepperton gentility," etc. etc.

On the other hand, where the subject requires some delimitation, where for the sake of clearness it is desirable to mark out the territory beforehand, we find in the introductory paragraph a general statement of the writer's intention, definitions of terms, and so on. Thus Newman, in the essay on *Literature*, begins with a careful definition of his principal terms, and an outline of what he intends to discuss in the essay. Similarly Carlyle's essay on *History* begins :

"Clio was figured among the ancients as the eldest daughter of memory, the chief of the Muses ; which dignity, whether we regard the essential qualities of her art, or its practice and acceptance among men, we shall still find to have been fitly bestowed. History, as it lies at the root of all science, is also the first distinct product of man's spiritual nature ; his earliest expression of what can be called thought. It is a looking both before and after ; as, indeed, the coming time already waits, unseen, yet definitely shaped, predetermined and inevitable, in the Time come ; and only by the combination of both is either completed.

The Sibylline books, though old, are not the oldest. Some nations have prophecy, some have not: but of all mankind there is no tribe so rude that it has not attempted history, though several have not arithmetic enough to count Five. History has been written with quipo-threads, with feather pictures, with wampum-belts; and still oftener with earth mounds and monumental stone heaps, whether as pyramid or cairn; for the Celt and the Copt, the Red man as well as the White, lives between two eternities, and warring against Oblivion, he would fain unite himself in clear conscious relation, as in dim unconscious relation he is already united, with the whole future and the whole Past."

So also, to take a last example, Walter Bagehot, in his essay on *Shakespeare, The Man*, is careful in the opening paragraph to mark out the ground he intends to traverse:

"The greatest of English poets, it is often said, is but a name. 'No letter of his writing, no record of his conversation, no character of him drawn with any fullness by a contemporary,' have been extracted by antiquaries from the piles of rubbish which they have sifted. Yet of no person is there a clearer picture in the popular fancy. You seem to have known Shakespeare—to have seen Shakespeare—to have been friends with Shakespeare. We would attempt a slight delineation of the popular idea which has been formed, not from loose tradition or from remote research, not from what some one says some one else said that the poet said, but from data which are at least undoubted, from the sure testimony of his certain works."

The nature of the initial paragraph is thus largely determined by the nature of the composition. It is only to be expected that in narrative or descriptive work the narrative or description should begin immediately without any further preliminaries, the only important requirement being that a suitable point of departure should be selected. But in argumentative or expository composition, the subject of which is frequently so wide that a single essay, or even a single book, would be insufficient to cover the whole ground, some preliminary qualification is necessary. In the first case the subject-matter is more or less complete and self-contained, and can be treated as such; in the second case the subject-matter is a part of a larger whole, and it is necessary to state at the outset how much of it is to be treated. Needless to say, there must be many cases in which the above generalisation on the nature of the initial paragraph will not hold good. Here, as everywhere in writing, the writer retains the liberty to introduce his subject in the way which he thinks most effective under the particular circumstances.

Sometimes, again, the introductory paragraph is not introductory to the whole composition, but only to one of the larger divisions of the subject-matter. Such an introductory paragraph is to be seen, for example, in Macaulay's essay on *Ranke's History of the Popes* :

"We will attempt to lay before our readers, in a short compass, what appears to us to be the real history of the contest which began with the preaching of Luther against indulgences, and which may, in one sense, be said to have been terminated a hundred and thirty years later by the Treaty of Westphalia."

This paragraph, occurring about the middle of the essay, follows another short paragraph which sums up all that had preceded. It indicates, therefore, a new departure in the treatment of the subject, and, together with the preceding paragraph, forms a bridge of transition between these two main heads of treatment. We now propose to treat of transition paragraphs a little more fully.

### Transition Paragraphs

As in the last example from Macaulay, so also in the writings of all good essayists, there will be found both paragraphs and sentences which have the function of smoothing over the apparent breaks in the continuity of the discourse. We propose to deal with the latter in this section, whilst leaving for consideration afterwards the details of the former.

It is clear that if an essay were made up of a series of compact and self-contained units, or paragraphs, without any implied relation, the effect produced by them would be one of jerkiness; we should feel that the whole was a piece of patchwork. It is usual, to avoid creating this impression, to bridge over the gap between paragraphs, and this may be done in various ways. Either we conclude one paragraph with a sentence which points forward in sense to the next one, or we may begin a paragraph with a sentence which points back to the preceding one; and in this way the two paragraphs are linked together as parts of a larger whole, instead of being isolated, as if they were complete compositions in themselves.

But this manner of transition is only possible, as a

rule, where the subject-matter of the two paragraphs is sufficiently closely related to permit of such closer association ; where the matter of one paragraph is a development, by illustration, contrast, or in some other way, of the preceding paragraph. Where this is not the case, where the transition is to an entirely new phase of the subject, the more common method of indicating the change is to introduce the transition paragraph. Such a transition paragraph may either merely point out to the reader in a few words that a new departure is being made and briefly indicate its nature, or it may at the same time summarise what has gone before and connect it with what is to follow. An excellent example of this latter kind of transition paragraph is afforded by Newman's essay on *Literature* :

“And now we are naturally brought on to our third point, which is on the characteristics of Holy Scripture as compared with profane literature. Hitherto we have been concerned with the doctrine of these writers, viz. that style is an extra, that it is a mere artifice, and that hence it cannot be translated ; now we come to their fact, viz. that Scripture has no such artificial style, and that Scripture can easily be translated. Surely their fact is as untenable as their doctrine.”

An example of the other kind—i.e. where the writer does not refer back to what has been said in the preceding paragraphs, but contents himself with showing what he intends to write of next—is to be found in the already quoted essay of Macaulay :

“The Church of Rome was still in outward show as stately and splendid as ever ; but her foundation was

undermined. No state had quitted her communion or confiscated her revenues ; but the reverence of the people was everywhere departing from her."

After this preliminary Macaulay goes on to describe the decay of the Roman Church, and the next paragraph begins :

• "The first great warning stroke was the fall of that society which, in the conflict with Protestantism, had saved the Catholic Church from destruction."

Although such transition paragraphs are common in argumentative and in expository writing, they are, on the other hand, comparatively rare in descriptions and in narrative writing. This is, of course, largely due to the nature of the subject, for a narrative or a description naturally flows of itself, and does not require the elaborate route indications which are necessary in a complicated piece of argument or exposition. In a narrative one incident follows from another as effect or consequence, and in a description the mere passing from the treatment of one object to that of another is quite sufficient transition, since in either case the development is quite clear. In argument, on the other hand, where one passes from one point of view to another and then back again to the original one, some guidance is more necessary if the plan of the whole is to be clear to the reader.

### Concluding Paragraphs

The function of the concluding paragraph, more particularly when it is of the formal kind, is to wind up the essay or chapter. It should finish up, enforce,

or emphasise whatever may have been developed in the body of the essay. This it may do in various ways too numerous to mention here. In Newman's essay on *Literature* the final paragraph restates in a different form the proposition which he had set out to prove :

“ If, then, the power of speech is a gift as great as any that can be named—if the origin of language is by many philosophers even considered to be nothing short of divine,—if by means of words the secrets of the heart are brought to light, pain of soul is relieved, hidden grief is carried off, sympathy conveyed, counsel imparted, experience recorded and wisdom perpetuated,—if by great authors the many are drawn up into unity, national character is fixed, a people speaks, the past and the future, the East and the West, are brought into communication with each other,—if such men are, in a word, the spokesmen and prophets of the human family,—it will not answer to make light of Literature or to neglect its study ; rather we may be sure that, in proportion as we master it, in whatever language, and imbibe its spirit, we shall ourselves become in our own measure the ministers of like benefits to others, be they few or many, be they in the obscurer or the more distinguished walks of life,—who are united to us by social ties, and are within the sphere of our personal influence.”

In others, again, the application of the particular truth which has been developed is pointed out, a warning is given, or any other method may be adopted of emphasising the views of the writer.

Before leaving this section of the subject, it may

be well to recall to the reader what has already been pointed out, that introductory, transition, and concluding paragraphs, as above described, are all more or less of a formal nature, and are for that reason more especially appropriate to the formal kinds of composition—, *i.e.* to argument and exposition. It is here, and perhaps here only, that the writer is more or less compelled to marshal his facts and arguments in such a way that they may be most effectively used. The necessity of ordering and marshalling the material is here inherent in the nature of the subject, for whoever would teach, persuade, or convert must present his case as a whole at once easily surveyed and assimilated. The interest of argument and exposition differs from the interest in description and narrative in just this material respect, that in the former it lies in the whole purpose and intention of the writer, each part being manifestly only a subordinate part of a definitely planned whole, whereas in the latter the interest may be in the parts in and for themselves, and the omission of a particular part need not necessarily destroy, or even impair, the impression of the whole.

### Sequence of Paragraphs

In the preceding section mention was made of transition sentences and paragraphs, the function of which was to lead on smoothly from one paragraph to another. The questions which must now engage our attention are : What is the relation of one paragraph to another ? In what order do paragraphs follow one another ? How is the relation of one paragraph to another indicated ? But in attempting to answer these questions



we must bear in mind the distinction already drawn between paragraphs that are formal and those that are not; for it is, generally, only in the formal kind that the relation is actually stated in words.

Generally speaking, the relation of paragraph to paragraph is not nearly so close in narrative and descriptive writing as it is in more formal composition. In the former each paragraph is more complete in itself, and is not an absolutely essential link in a chain of evidence or proof, as it tends to be in the latter. Thus, for example, a proposition of Euclid, to take an extreme case, cannot begin with the last stage of the proof. In so far as each conclusion springs from another, it is necessary that this latter should be stated first, so that the nature of the subject here imposes a certain logical and coherent order on the writer. The same principle also applies to the less rigid kinds of writing. But, on the other hand, a description of a landscape may begin or end with the description of any one of dozens of features. Hence not only is the order of paragraphs in narrative and descriptive work not so rigidly determined by the subject, but also the transition need not be so clearly marked as in argument or exposition. In the former the sequence of paragraphs and the relation of one to another is more or less arbitrary. It depends only upon the manner in which the objects or events group themselves in the mind of the writer, on the relative significance which he attaches to each, and this will necessarily vary from individual to individual.

Quite different is the structure of the paragraph in exposition and argument, where the nature of the

subject imposes, as we have seen, certain (more or less flexible) lines of development. The structure of such a paragraph resembles the structure of a house. You cannot put on your roof until you have laid your foundations and built your walls, and though you may build the inner walls or the outer ones first, you cannot put in the floors until both are up. Just as there are many ways of building a house, so also there are many ways of building an essay. We may proceed from the general to the particular, or from the particular to the general, from the unknown to the known, or *vice versa*; from the easy to the difficult, or from the difficult to the easy, and so on. But what is characteristic of all the methods of procedure is that, having begun in one way, we must continue in it, for the formal paragraph, like the house, is constructed with a definite purpose in view and must be adapted to that end.

In less formal kinds of writing the nature of the beginning does not tie one down so much in this way. In the essay of Stevenson, for example, analysed on page 68, the order of the paragraphs might very well be changed without any considerable loss of effect, or if it did lessen the artistic value, yet it would not create any such confusion in the mind of the reader as would a change of point of view or of manner of presentation in the middle of a demonstration or proof.

Paragraphs of the latter kind are, therefore, much more closely related, and must be more carefully knit together. That this really is so may easily be seen by the examination of a few good essays of this kind. If, for example, we look at the essay of Addison printed

on pp. 59-63, we shall immediately find an illustration of this principle. We notice that the second and third paragraphs are linked together by the words, "these exceptions"; the third and fourth by the words, "in its third relation"; the fifth and sixth by the words, "this cheerfulness of heart"; the sixth to the seventh by the word "cheerfulness"; the seventh to the eighth by the words, "the vicious man and the Atheist"; the eighth to the ninth by the words, "after having mentioned these two great principles"; the tenth to the eleventh by the words, "The second source of cheerfulness"; and the eleventh to the twelfth by the words, "such considerations." Thus it appears that each paragraph which is in intimate sense relation with its predecessor is linked to it by some word which carries the mind back in thought to what has gone before, and thus the transition to a further development of the subject is made more easy, and the continuity of the whole is preserved. In this case we see that the transition is made either by the use of relative words, which naturally make one think of their grammatical antecedents, such as *this*, *these*, *such*; or by the use of some more explicit word of reference, such as *cheerfulness*, *the vicious man*, *in its third relation*, etc.

It is also worth noticing, in the same essay, that where the connection in sense is not so close—i.e. between the main divisions of the essay, as analysed on page 64,—there is no such link, so that in this way the larger heads of the essay are given greater isolation and detachment. Thus paragraphs 4 and 5, paragraphs 6, 7, 8, and 9, paragraphs 10, 11, and 12, are linked by connectives, since each constitutes a group by itself for the

development of some main head of the essay; but, on the other hand, paragraph 3, the last of the first group, is not linked to paragraph 4, the first of the second group; and paragraph 9, the last of the third group, is not linked to paragraph 10, the first of the fourth group.

But although this formal structure of the paragraph is most frequent in the kinds of composition to which it is more appropriate, yet it is not entirely restricted to those kinds. In narrative and descriptive writing likewise the nature of the subject may impose a certain paragraph sequence in preference to any other. An essay on the life of Gladstone would obviously not begin with his life as a Prime Minister and then go back to his life as a child; an essay on the Thirty Years War, if it dealt only with the narrative of events; would naturally present these in strict chronological order. In the same way many other subjects require a specific treatment, from which it would be difficult or even impossible to depart. Yet nevertheless the order and arrangement of paragraphs in essays of this kind is probably not, in the great majority of cases, so restricted and so logical as in essays of the more formal kind.

Even in argument and exposition, however, there is great latitude in paragraph order and arrangement. One writer will think one argument more important than another, and will place it and develop it accordingly, whilst a second writer might deal quite differently with it. Indeed, it is impossible to speak of any laws or rules of paragraph sequence; all that can be said is that each paragraph should have unity, and should

add something definite to the movement. Very often it makes no more difference to the final impression which paragraph comes first than it makes whether one puts sugar and cream into the cup before the tea. If the paragraphs are arranged in the order which best develops the sense, and makes it at the same time most clear to the reader, that is all that can be required of them. Everything depends, in the last resort, on the impression which the writer wishes to create: we may write, "He was sent to prison because he stole a purse," or "Because he stole a purse he was sent to prison." Both sentences are equally correct, and both are equally good style. The only difference between them is that they do not mean exactly the same thing. So it is with paragraphs also. Various arrangements may be possible, and all may be good absolutely, but in the particular case they will vary much in force of emphasis, in clearness, and in coherence. Certain sequences, it is true, are obvious; an illustration will follow the statement of the principle which it illustrates and so also will the application of a principle, but apart from such cases there cannot be anything in the nature of a settled rule of sequence. The only practical rule that can be formulated is the negative one that no paragraph should be an unnecessary digression, and the positive one that every paragraph should add something definite, clear, and coherent to the theme.

To conclude this section we may take two more essays, by different writers, and examine them to see to what extent the paragraphs are linked together. The first essay is the already-mentioned essay of Macaulay, *Ranke's History of the Popes*, from which we take the

first sentence of each paragraph and italicise the words which show the paragraph connection :

Par. 2. "The subject of *this book* has always appeared to us singularly interesting."

Par. 3. "There is not . . . a work of human policy so well deserving of examination as *the Roman Catholic Church*."

Par. 5. "Indeed the *argument which we are considering* seems to us to be founded on an entire mistake."

Par. 6. "But with *theology* the case is different."

Par. 7. "Then, *again*, all the great enigmas which perplex the *natural theologian* are the same in all ages."

Par. 8. "*Natural theology, then*, is not a progressive science."

Par. 10. "One *reservation* indeed must be made."

Par. 11. "*This reservation* affects not at all the truth of our proposition."

Par. 12. "*For these reasons* we have ceased to wonder at the vagaries of superstition."

Par. 13. "The history of Catholicism strikingly illustrates *these observations*."

Par. 14. "The first of *these insurrections* broke out in the region where the beautiful language of Oc is spoken."

Par. 16. "A century and a half passed away, and then came the *second great rising* up of the human intellect against the spiritual domination of Rome."

Par. 17. "But *this danger* also passed by."

Par. 18. "Another century went by, and then began the *third and most memorable struggle* for spiritual freedom."

And so on.

In the above sentences we discover not only that one paragraph is connected with another wherever the sense requires it, but also that the greater number of these paragraphs begin with a sentence which is, to all intents and purposes, the topic sentence or key sentence referred to below.

The second essay which we propose to examine from this point of view is Bagehot's essay, *Shakespeare, The Man*. We include here some examples of a transition of a different kind—i.e. where it is already expressed in the last sentence of a paragraph as well as in the first of the succeeding one. Here some typical examples are given without reference to the number of the paragraph :

"We would attempt a slight delineation of the popular idea which has been formed . . . from the sure testimony of *his certain works*."

"Some extreme sceptics, we know, doubt whether it is possible to deduce anything as to an author's character *from his works*."

"First of all it may be said that Shakespeare's works could only be produced by a first-rate imagination working on a *first-rate experience*."

"We may assume that Shakespeare had a *great experience*."

"To a *great experience* one thing is essential, an experiencing nature."

"A man of *this sort* is a curious mental phenomenon."

"But Shakespeare was not a man of *this sort*."

"In this respect Shakespeare had the advantage of one whom in many points he much resembles—*Sir Walter Scott*."

"Scott's is the strong admiration of a rough mind, Shakespeare's the nice minuteness of a susceptible one."

"A perfectly poetic appreciation of nature contains two elements, a knowledge of facts and a sensibility to charms."

"Perhaps this is the defect of the greatest dramatic genius of recent times—Goethe."

And so on.

These transitional words may be mere connectives—*and, this, that, the above*; or they may introduce a contrast—*yet, but, on the other hand*; or a comparison—*still more, even better, etc.* Frequently the connection is not expressed directly, or by any words, but the opening sentence of the paragraph clearly shows that the same theme is still being developed; the link is rather a sense-link than a word-link. Sometimes, again, the transition is marked in the final sentence of a paragraph, which points forward, instead of in the first sentence, which looks back. Generally, too, the transition in the formal paragraph is not of the same kind as in the descriptive or narrative paragraph. In the former this link, if it is a pronoun or adverb, is usually relative; it indicates cause or consequence or similar relation, whereas in descriptive work it is usually a local adverb, and in narrative a temporal one.

### Structure of the Single Paragraph

A good deal has already been said in the preceding pages on the structure of the paragraph, and there is really little to be added. If the paragraph has unity, is clear and coherent, it is all that we can ask of it. The rest is entirely a matter of style.



Of unity we have already spoken. Coherence in a paragraph is essentially the same thing as coherence in a whole composition, the only difference being that the units are sentences instead of paragraphs. If the sentences all add something to the general advance of the composition ; if none of them, by the introduction of some irrelevant detail, distracts the attention from the business immediately in hand ; if they are all so ordered as to give the maximum of effect, then the paragraph is coherent.

For the purpose of securing unity and coherence in a paragraph, many text-books of composition advocate the use of what is called a "topic sentence," which has the same function in the structure of a paragraph as the title has in the whole composition. The topic sentence is the paragraph in essence, so to speak, the gist of it reduced to a single precise statement. It is thought that the use of the topic sentence secures greater unity, because, if the writer bears it in mind, he will better be able to compare with it every sentence which he adds to the paragraph, and thus be able to see if each new sentence is relevant to the topic sentence. Doubtless the topic sentence is very useful for this purpose, and there are, indeed, as we have seen above, a very large number of such sentences in the writings of good authors. Of course the topic sentence need not appear in its bare form in the paragraph ; it is sufficient if it is possible to construct one out of the matter developed in the paragraph, though, as a matter of fact, such a topic sentence does very often appear as the first or second sentence of the paragraph. Such a sentence has, moreover, the additional advantage of

seizing at once upon the reader's attention, of showing him the transition of thought, of immediately and in an emphatic manner introducing the subject, and, therefore, of helping him to follow, without any effort, the movement and development of the composition.

Thus, for example, in the initial sentences quoted on page 85, we find in each case a topic sentence, the thought of which is developed in the rest of the paragraph. A single example will show this. The following paragraph begins with a typical key sentence, and the rest of the paragraph is devoted to the development of the thought contained in it :

“We often hear it said that the world is constantly becoming more and more enlightened, and that this enlightening must be favourable to Protestantism and unfavourable to Catholicism. We wish that we could think so. But we see great reason to doubt whether this be a well-founded expectation. We see that during the last two hundred and fifty years the human mind has been in the highest degree active, that it has made great advances in every branch of natural philosophy, that it has produced innumerable inventions tending to promote the convenience of life, that medicine, surgery, chemistry, engineering, have been very greatly improved, that government, police, and law have been improved, though not to so great an extent as the physical sciences. Yet we see that during these two hundred and fifty years Protestantism has made no conquests worth speaking of. Nay, we believe, that so far as there has been a change, that change has been in favour of the church of Rome. We cannot, therefore, feel confident that the progress of knowledge will necessarily be fatal to

a system which has, to say the least, stood its ground in spite of the immense progress which knowledge has made since the days of Elizabeth."

Here the opening sentence indicates what the paragraph is to be about, and the final sentence is a mere repetition, in changed form, of the first. It does, indeed, sometimes happen that the topic sentence comes at the end of the paragraph, in which case it also has the advantage of summing up the arguments adduced, and of emphasising them by repetition. More particularly is this the case in arguments of the inductive kind.

A little reflection will show that the topic sentence is more appropriate to composition of an expository or argumentative nature than to description and narrative. It would not be easy, for example, to give a topic sentence to a paragraph descriptive of the Houses of Parliament, or of the view from the top of Snowdon. It could be done, of course, and, indeed, it sometimes is done, as, for example, when a paragraph is the development of a simile, or when a narrative or description is introduced by a general remark, followed by illustrations and examples—*e.g.* "John was reckless in his conduct. He first ignored his father's advice, and then," etc. But nevertheless the difference in kind between the paragraph in argument and exposition, and the paragraph in description and narrative, still remains. In the former every sentence in the paragraph is a part of the exposition or proof of a statement which would, or might, fall to the ground without it; whereas in the latter the final result is an impression or a group of impressions, an appeal to the imagination rather than

to the reason. Hence the difference : ' reason demands the complete and, logical unfolding of an idea, the imagination demands suggestion.'

A paragraph may also be studied from the point of view of the arrangement of the particular sentences, and of the way in which they are made to succeed one another. In some writers the sentences are most carefully knit together, in such a way that the sense seems to run over easily from one sentence to the next. In other writers, on the other hand, there are often awkward breaks in the continuity from sentence to sentence. An excellent example of a paragraph carefully welded in all its parts is the following :

Connected by *therefore*.

Connected by *and*.

C m.

Connected by *it*.

Connected by *submits and prescribes*.

Connected with *uses* in the preceding sentence, by the words *moving force*.

Connected by *horse*.

Connected in sense with *great evil*, above.

If we went at large into this most interesting subject, we should fill volumes. We will, therefore, advert to only one important part of the policy of the Church of Rome. She thoroughly understands, what no other Church has ever understood, how to deal with enthusiasts. In some sects, particularly in infant sects, enthusiasm is suffered to be rampant. In other sects, particularly in sects long established and richly endowed, it is regarded with aversion. The Catholic Church neither submits to enthusiasm nor prescribes it but uses it. She considers it as a great moving force which in itself, like the muscular power of a fine horse, is neither good nor evil, but which may be so directed as to produce great good or great evil ; and she assumes the direction to herself. It would be absurd to run down a horse like a wolf. It would be still more absurd to let him run wild, breaking down fences and trampling down

Connected by *rational*, in contrast to *absurd*, also by *subjugate* and *so directed*, above.

- Connected by *such* and by *enthusiasts*.

The empire of religious feelings is a paraphrase of *enthusiasts* in the preceding sentence.

Connected by the words *in this state* with the preceding sentence.

Linked by the word *accordingly* to the previous sentence. This sentence is an emphatic restatement of the sentence, *She understands how to deal with enthusiasts*, at the beginning of the paragraph.

passengers. The rational course is to subjugate his will without impairing his vigour; to teach him to obey the rein and then to urge him to full speed. Just such has been the system of the Church of Rome in regard to enthusiasts. She knows that when religious feelings have obtained the complete empire of the mind they impart a strange energy; that they raise men above the dominion of pain and pleasure; that obloquy becomes glory; that death itself is contemplated only as the beginning of a higher and happier life. She knows that a person in this state is no object of contempt. He may be vulgar, ignorant, visionary, extravagant; but he will do and suffer things which it is for her interest that somebody should do and suffer, yet from which calm and sober-minded men would shrink. She accordingly enlists him in her service, assigns to him some forlorn hope in which intrepidity and impetuosity are more wanted than judgment and self-command and sends him forth with her benedictions and her applause.

It appears, therefore, that the sentences of this paragraph are closely knit together, and that in consequence the sense is more easily followed throughout.

Quite different is the build of the following paragraph, in which the sentences are not run together at all, and in which there are no connectives or link words to preserve the flow of the sentences:

“The times were changed. The great remains of Athenian and Roman genius were studied by thousands. The Church had no longer a monopoly of learning.

The powers of the modern languages had at length been developed. The invention of printing had given new facilities to the intercourse of mind with mind. With such auspices commenced the great Reformation."

### Length of the Paragraph

It is not possible to theorise on the length of a paragraph, for it is determined chiefly by the general principles of the paragraph already laid down. Broadly speaking, a paragraph should not be so long as to fatigue the reader, or to make his attention flag; nor should it be so short as to distract him by the impression of scrappiness which a succession of too short paragraphs produces. But between these two extremes there are many possibilities. Within these limits the length of the paragraph must be determined by the amount of matter which can properly go into it, and even this quantity may itself be varied according to the writer's desire to vary the length of his paragraphs; for it is evident that a series of paragraphs of exactly the same length would be monotonous. As a general rule, a long paragraph carries weight and dignity—not, of course, simply because it is long, but because a long paragraph necessarily develops a point more fully than a short one, and thus makes that point more emphatic. But yet, on the other hand, just as it is a relief sometimes to lay dignity aside, so also it is sometimes a relief to find a short paragraph after a series of long ones.

Short paragraphs, on the other hand, quicken the movement and impart a lighter tone to a composition. Hence it is almost as rare to find a series of long paragraphs in the lighter kinds of prose as it is to find a

series of short ones in the more serious kinds. The average length of a paragraph in the serious critical essays of Macaulay is much greater than in the bright satirical essays of Addison, who rarely has a paragraph extending over more than a page. Three such paragraphs as the following are rarely found in Macaulay.

“But this danger also passed by. The civic power gave its strenuous support to the Church; and the Church made some show of reforming itself. The Council of Constance put an end to the schism. The whole Catholic world was again united under a single chief; and rules were laid down which seemed to make it improbable that the power of that chief would be grossly abused. The most distinguished teachers of the new doctrine were put to death. The English government put down the Lollards with merciless rigour; and, in the next generation, no trace of the second revolt against the Papacy could be found except among the rude population of the mountains of Bohemia.

“Another century went by, and then began the third and the most memorable struggle for spiritual freedom. The times were changed. The great remains of Athenian and Roman genius were studied by thousands. The Church had no longer a monopoly of learning. The powers of the modern languages had at length been developed. The invention of printing had given new facilities to the intercourse of mind with mind. With such auspices commenced the great Reformation.

“We will attempt to lay before our readers, in a short compass, what appears to us to be the real history

of the contest which began with the preaching of Luther against the Indulgences, and which may, in one sense, be said to have been terminated a hundred and thirty years later by the Treaty of Westphalia."

When they do occur, it is usually for some rhetorical purpose, such as emphasis, and only rarely, as in the second of the above paragraphs, to hasten the movement.

So far as general principles go, it would seem that a composition which is made up of a single paragraph might run to considerable length, since in that case the whole composition necessarily being short, there would be no risk of the reader's attention flagging. In the same way three or four paragraphs might be quite short without disconcerting the reader, when twenty or thirty paragraphs of the same length would not do at all.

Perhaps one of the most important things to bear in mind in determining the length of a paragraph is that a correct length helps to preserve the proportions of a composition. If, for example, an essay develops a subject under six main heads, with one paragraph for each, there would clearly be a lack of proportion if one of these six paragraphs were longer than all the rest put together. The shorter paragraphs would then, by reason of their extreme shortness, tend to lose their significance. The reader would feel that the composition was really on the subject of the one longer paragraph, and that the remaining ones were more or less irrelevant, not sufficiently developed to carry weight, or to add anything to the main theme. By this we do not mean that there should not be a number of short



paragraphs grouped round a longer one, but only that, in a composition consisting of a few paragraphs, one should not swamp the rest and destroy their significance.

Paragraph length is also a useful means of giving emphasis to a particular part of a composition. A long paragraph, by its mass, is more emphatic than a short one, since whatever is more fully developed becomes more important and, indirectly, more emphatic. A short paragraph may, however, also be emphatic by reason of the contrast of its shortness. In this case the emphasis depends, not as in the previous case, on the fullness of development, but on the fact that the matter of the paragraph is made more conspicuous and more easily surveyed by being placed in a single short paragraph. Brevity and conciseness, then, are a source of emphasis as well as fullness and development.

One consequence of the fact that whatever is more fully stated tends to gain in importance and emphasis is that one should not unduly enlarge any part of a composition which is relatively unimportant, since to do so is to take away the attention of the reader from the really important parts, and to give him a wrong impression of what the writer wishes to emphasise. This is really the same thing as to say that one should practise repression, without which errors of proportion are always apt to arise. This is especially true of the essays of beginners, who, led away by their personal interest in some particular detail, or by some special knowledge, forget that it is only a detail, and give it a prominence above its due.

When the demands of unity, clearness, and emphasis have been satisfied, all that remains to be done, from

the point of view of paragraph length, is to give as much variety as is possible. Without variety, whether it be in the use of words, in the structure of sentences, or in the length of paragraphs, any composition is in danger of becoming monotonous and trying to the reader.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SENTENCE

THE study of the paragraph is the study of plan and arrangement; the principles which govern its structure and disposition have in view the final effect or impression of the whole composition. The study of the sentence, on the other hand, is the study of clearness in details, and the principles which govern its structure have in view the expression of thoughts rather than the arrangement of them.

A sentence is the expression of a simple or complex thought, and its form will vary according to the simplicity or complexity of the thought which it represents. One way of treating the sentence, therefore, is to discuss the manner in which it may best perform its function.

In so far as the sentence is the expression of a single thought, the most important qualities which we might expect to find in it are unity and clearness, and if the sentence is the expression of a complex thought, we should expect to find coherence also. These qualities of sentences are partly of a grammatical and partly of a stylistic nature, and it is our intention to treat them from both points of view.

The sentence, considered as a grammatical unit, is simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex, and is subject to the ordinary rules of accident and syntax governing such sentences ; the sentence considered as a stylistic unit may be periodic or loose, long or short, balanced or not, and the only law governing it in this respect is the law of personal taste. It may be brief, simple, direct, or it may be prolix, verbose, and redundant ; it may be euphonious or harsh-sounding, emphatic or feeble, or it may possess any other of the numerous qualities of style which will have to be discussed later. For the present we propose to deal with unity in sentences.

### Unity

Unity is the simple demand of our minds to see, hear, smell, or taste one thing at a time in order that we may accurately perceive its nature. The mind prefers to have things presented to it one at a time. Hence the necessity for unity in the sentence. It is, indeed, quite as difficult to grasp the meaning of a sentence which lacks unity as it is to disengage a melody when two bands, both within earshot, are playing different tunes at the same time, or as it is to pick out the features of a familiar face in a crowd. Unity in a sentence, then, is neither more nor less than the presentation of just as much thought as can be immediately, and without risk of confusion, understood by the reader, or, in other words, of just so much thought as the reader will immediately feel to belong together. This quantity varies, of course, from reader to reader ; what to one is unity is to another not ; to the uncultivated a long complex-compound sentence, however well constructed,

is difficult to follow. The amount of matter which may be put into a sentence varies, however, not only with the intelligence of the reader, but also with the skill of the writer in constructing his sentences. Some writers can put a great deal into a single sentence, and yet construct it so skilfully that a moderately inexperienced reader can follow the meaning with ease; others, again, might handle the same material so clumsily that the sentence would confuse even the most intelligent reader.

Unity is most easily secured in the simple sentence, for here there are few pitfalls. This type of sentence is the one in commonest use in ordinary conversation, and we are so familiar with the use of it that we seldom go astray; we feel instinctively when it is getting out of hand and becoming obscure. With a due consideration for the order of words and the avoidance of ambiguity, even the novice should not find any serious difficulty in the use of it. Such sentences as "He wrote a book," "The sun rises at seven to-morrow morning," "He always dines at the same restaurant," cannot very well be anything else but clear, unless the words are used in an ambiguous sense, in which case the fault does not lie in the construction of the sentence.

But as soon as we come to the compound or complex sentence, the possibilities of error become more numerous, for there is here so much more room for the introduction of details which, by their irrelevance, destroy the unity of the sentence. The danger to unity in the compound sentence lies in the fact that it must by its very nature contain at least two separate and independent thoughts. These may not be so closely related as to justify their being placed in the same sentence. If they are not

such that they readily associate in the mind of the reader, the sentence will lack unity; he will puzzle himself in vain to discover why these two particular thoughts are linked together. The sentence "The sun rises and sets," has unity, because, though it gives expression to two distinct and independent thoughts, yet they are such as to associate readily in the mind of the reader, who finds the union of them quite natural and consonant with his own experience of the movements of the sun. Quite different would be the impression made by the connection of two totally unrelated thoughts in such a sentence as "The sun sets and the dog barks." In this sentence there is no unity, because there is no connection between the sun setting and the dog barking. One or other of the statements is irrelevant and should be omitted. Similar sentences lacking unity are :

"The accident occurred in Wellington Square, which was named in memory of the celebrated Duke."

"In order to clean the chain, the screw marked A should be removed."

"We crossed this range of hills, and at our feet lay a large lake."

The last two of these examples illustrate a lack of unity of a somewhat different kind; for in these the thoughts expressed are not unrelated, nor are they irrelevant, but there is a change in the point of view in the second part of the sentence. One of them begins from the point of view of the man who wishes to clean the chain, and then goes over to the point of view of the screw which has to be removed. What the writer

really means is, "In order to clean the chain, remove the screw marked A," etc. In the last example also the point of view is changed from that of the speaker to that of the lake. This sentence is easily made consistent by writing it in the form: "We crossed this range of hills, and saw a large lake lying at our feet."

The observation of the following points may prove useful in securing sentence unity:

1. Avoid the introduction of any matter into a sentence which has no obvious bearing on the main thought. Under this head come all parentheses which do not in some way illumine the principal thought. Even proper parentheses should not be too numerous, as they tend to obscure the thought.

2. Avoid stringing together a number of clauses by *and's* and *but's*, unless the thought they introduce is a real and relevant addition or contrast.

3. Do not crowd into a sentence things which have so little connection with the main thought that they would better be put into sentences by themselves.

As examples of defective unity a few more sentences are added here:

"Archbishop Tillotson died in this year. He was exceedingly beloved both by King William and Queen Mary, who nominated Dr. Tennison, Bishop of Lincoln, to succeed him."

Here the last announcement is evidently irrelevant, and is therefore superfluous.

"In this uneasy state, both of his public and private life, Cicero was oppressed by a new and cruel affliction, the death of his daughter Tullia, which happened soon

after her divorce from Dolabella, whose manners and humours were entirely disagreeable to her."

In this sentence the important idea is that Cicero was oppressed by the death of his daughter, the time of which may very properly be given. The cause of Tullia's divorce, however, has nothing whatever to do with Cicero's grief, and is therefore irrelevant.

An excellent example of the incoherence which may arise from disregarding the principle of unity is seen in the next sentence, quoted by Blair from Sir William Temple :

"The usual acceptation takes profit and pleasure for two different things ; and not only calls the followers or votaries of them by the several names of busy and idle men ; but distinguishes the faculties of the mind, that are conversant about them, calling the operations of the first wisdom, and of the other, wit ; which is a Saxon word used to express what the Spaniards and Italians call *ingenio*, and the French, *esprit*, both from the Latin ; though I think wit more particularly signifies that of poetry, as may occur in the remarks on the Runic language."

Here everything after the word *wit* is superfluous. As a last example we may take, from the same source, sentence of Dean Swift :

"To this succeeded that licentiousness which entered with the Restoration, and, from infecting our religion and morals, fell to corrupt our language ; which last was not like to be much improved by those, who, at that time made up the court of King Charles the Second ; either such as had followed him in his banishment, or



who had been altogether conversant in the dialect of these fanatic times; or young men who had been educated in the same country; so that the court, which used to be the standard of correctness and propriety of speech, was then, and I think has ever since continued; the worst school in England for that accomplishment; and so will remain, till better care be taken of the education of the nobility, that they may set out into the world with some foundation of literature, in order to qualify them for patterns of politeness."

### Clearness and Coherence

Clearness in a sentence consists mainly in the arrangement of words and clauses in a sentence in such a way that the main thought is easily seized, and ambiguity avoided. Like unity, it is most easily achieved in the simple sentence, though even here there are pitfalls. One of the commonest is the improper use of participial phrases, such as, "Though not wishing to insist, this point is deserving of consideration," in which sentence the participle is left suspended—i.e. without a subject. The sentence is easily rectified by rewriting it: "Though not wishing to insist on it, I think that this point is deserving of consideration."

A similar lack of clearness is often found in comparative clauses of the type: "Manchester is nearer Liverpool than London," in which sentence it is not at all clear whether the meaning is that Manchester is nearer to Liverpool than London is, or that Manchester is nearer to Liverpool than to London.

Careless arrangement is perhaps the most frequent cause of ambiguity in a sentence. Such constructions

as "He kept the money which he earned by writing books in the bank," abound, though the ambiguity is avoided by the observance of the general rule that modifiers should be placed as near as possible to the words they modify—in this particular case by writing: "He kept in the bank the money which he earned by writing books."

Some of the more important aids to clearness may now be mentioned:

1. Place all modifiers as near as possible to the word they modify, as in the last example.

2. Avoid the use of unrelated participial phrases, as in the example given above.

3. Place the main thought in the main clause. The following sentence is not clear, and does not say exactly what is meant, because this rule has been violated: "Mr. Lloyd-George entered the hall when the audience stood up." Presumably the author does not mean to say that Mr. Lloyd-George waited until the audience stood up before entering the hall, but that the audience stood up when he entered the hall.

4. Be especially careful in the use of pronouns, more particularly in the use of relatives and *it*. These words are frequently used without any antecedent, or with an antecedent which is not clear. For example: "Freedom of thought, or at any rate the free expression of it, was unknown." In this sentence the logical antecedent to *it* is *freedom of thought*, but the writer of the sentence clearly means it to refer to *thought* only.

Other examples are:

"He told his brother that he had failed in his examination." Which of the brothers had failed?

"This block should be pulled down if it is necessary."  
At first sight we connect *it* with *block*.

"Men look with an evil eye on the good that is in others, and think that their reputation obscures them, and their commendable qualities stand in their light; and therefore they do what they can to cast a cloud over them, that the bright shining of their virtues may not obscure them." In this sentence the reference of *they* and *their* is so obscure that it is almost impossible to discover it.

5. Do not write as a compound sentence, with coordinate clauses, what should be a complex sentence with a subordinate clause: "He was warned of the danger by his friends, and in spite of their warning he went out, at the imminent risk of his life." This sentence would be both clearer and stronger in effect if it had been written as a complex sentence in the form: "Though warned of the danger by his friends, he yet went out, at the imminent risk of his life," since the thought beginning with *yet* is the more important one.

6. Repeat the subject of the sentence if the meaning is not clear without it: "He often writes to his old school-friend, who is now abroad and sends him the latest books." This sentence might be rewritten either, "He often writes to his old school-friend, who is now abroad, and he sends him the latest books," or, "He often writes to his old school-friend, who is now abroad and who sends him the latest books," according to the sense which the writer wishes to convey.

7. Repeat a preposition if clearness demands it: "Manchester is nearer to Liverpool than to London."

The following sentence is so ill-constructed that it is not easily mended:

“The works of George Eliot are valuable, not so much from the point of view of their interest as narrative, but as a criticism of existing social arrangements, and the vivid insight they reveal into the problems of the inner life.”

On what word does the clause beginning, *the vivid insight*, depend? If it depends upon *valuable*, then the preposition *for* should be inserted; if the clause is intended to run parallel with the clause *but as a criticism of existing social arrangements*, then the construction is impossible, and it should be changed to *and a revelation of the problems of the inner life*.

8. Repeat the principal verb, or substitute for it the necessary form of the verb *do*, where clearness demands it. This is especially necessary in certain comparative sentences: “The Swedes distrust the Russians more than the Norwegians *do*.”

9. Where there are many scattered subjects to one verb, summarise them by a recapitulatory word, such as *these*, *such*:

“Choice cookery, delicious wines, lovely women, hounds, falcons, horses, newly-discovered manuscripts of the classics, sonnets and burlesque romances in the sweetest Tuscan, just as licentious as a fine sense of the graceful would permit, plate from the hand of Benvenuto, designs for palaces by Michael Angelo, frescoes by Raphael, busts, mosaics, and gems, just dug up from the ruins of ancient temples and villas—

these things were the delight and even the serious business of their lives."

10. Avoid the temptation to tack clause on to clause, when each new one has no bearing on the principal clause. The stock example of this kind of sentence is the rime of *The House that Jack built*. Here is another from a student's essay :

"Imagine sixty children glued to their seats, for after a few weeks in school even the most rebellious child learns that he must be silent in class, although he may occasionally forget the fact, and being required to fix his attention on one particular subject about which half of them may not be really interested, but above all not to be allowed to move about, yes, even to be punished if they attempt to change their positions."

11. An elliptical phrase should not be inserted into a sentence unless it refers to the subject of the principal sentence : "Whilst still a boy, my father died." This sentence is perfectly good English if it means that the father died whilst he (the father) was still a boy. But it obviously does not mean that. The sentence must therefore be recast : "Whilst I was still a boy, my father died."

12. Avoid using two different constructions dependent on the same word : "He settled down to his work and to prepare his dissertation." Omit *to prepare* or insert *to do* before *his work*.

13. In an elliptical subordinate clause the subject and verb may only be supplied from the principal clause : "For, though summer, I knew Mr. Rochester would

like to see a cheerful hearth." In this sentence it is possible to supply the verb *was*, but not the subject *it*. The sentence should be rewritten: "For though it was summer, I knew," etc.

14. Do not begin a grammatical construction and leave it unfinished: "There are some of them I do not know whether they are eligible or not." This sentence should read: "I do not know if some of them are eligible or not."

15. Do not use a *when* or *where* clause with the function of a noun: "Intoxication is when the brain is affected by alcohol."

Perhaps the commonest cause of obscurity in writing arises from ambiguity. We have already seen a number of examples of this defect, examples in most of which the ambiguity arose either from a careless arrangement of words, or from the use of pronouns with uncertain reference, or from the omission of such important guide words as prepositions. There are, however, other sources of ambiguity, the chief one being unclear thought, showing itself in over-condensed elliptical sentences. Another common cause of ambiguity is the double sense which naturally attaches to words themselves, so that if the context does not make it quite clear which sense is implied, the result may be obscurity. We shall have to notice numerous other cases of ambiguity in the chapter on grammar, so for the present we content ourselves with adding a couple of examples, in which the ambiguity arises, in the first place from the order of words, and in the second and third from the double meaning of the italicised words:

"You could see it had been done with half an eye,"

instead of, "You could see with half an eye that it had been done."

"Love of God." Does this mean God's love or our love of God?

"He has a *certain* aim in life." Is *certain* a demonstrative?

### Length of the Sentence—Variety

The length of a sentence, like the length of a paragraph, depends entirely upon how much has to go into it; if the thought is simple, the sentence may be brief; if the thought is complex, it will be long. There is no absolute value either in the one kind or the other; each has its advantages and disadvantages, and each would become tiresome and monotonous if it were used to the exclusion of the other.

The short sentence has the advantage over the long one of being more vivid, more direct, and often more easily understood. It is also, especially when sandwiched between two or more long sentences, more emphatic, in much the same way as a short paragraph may be emphatic under similar conditions. The long sentence, on the other hand, allows the introduction of all sorts of qualifying circumstances, and, by reason of its greater body of meaning, is more weighty and more dignified than the short sentence. But the chief advantage of the long sentence, whether compound or complex, is that it is economical; it enables the writer, in less space, to do the work of a number of simple sentences. By the aid of the co-ordinate and the subordinate clause, it is possible, not only to express all the thoughts which might be put into simple sentences, but also to

show the relation between those thoughts and to grade them delicately in the order of their respective significance. The long sentence has the further advantage that it leaves wider scope to the writer to secure rhythm and euphony.

The great danger of the long sentence is that it may become too long for the reader to comprehend with ease. Such long unintelligible sentences were very common in early prose writers. Some of them have already been quoted, but we may add one more in this place, as a warning to the novice of the dangers of this kind of sentence :

“As therefore physicians are many times forced to leave such methods of curing as themselves know to be the fittest, and being overruled by their patient's impatience are fain to try the best they can do, in taking that way of cure which the cured will yield unto ; in like sort, considering how the case doth stand with this age full of tongue and weak of brain, behold we yield to the stream thereof ; into the causes of goodness we will not make any curious or deep inquiry ; to touch them now and then it shall be sufficient, when they are so near at hand that easily they may be conceived without any far-removed discourse : that we are contented to prove, which being the worse in itself, is notwithstanding now by reason of common imbecility the fitter and likelier to be brooked.”—*Hooker*.

• The length of a sentence further depends upon the nature of the subject-matter. An argument, with its many complications and *nuances*, is evidently a much more complex thing than a description or a narrative,



both of which suggest images rather than marshal ideas. Argument and exposition are constantly engaged with reasons, causes, conditions, and the numerous other relations in which one thing or one idea may stand to another; narrative concerns itself, as a rule, only with order in time, and description with order in space. In argument and exposition, then, the business of the writer is to make his thoughts clear, and to do this he must be careful of the logical structure of his sentences; in narrative and description, on the other hand, the writer wishes to excite interest, and to do so he must attend to the imaginative structure of his sentences rather than to logical relations; he must be careful of the choice of words rather than of the careful grouping of ideas and carefully distributed emphasis.

But whatever the subject-matter, the mind requires variety, if its attention is to be retained. Monotony of sentence structure makes a composition dead; variety quickens it, makes it attractive and interesting. The means of securing variety in sentence structure are many, for variety is not only a question of length, but also of structure. The syntax of English allows considerable freedom in the order of words in a sentence, and there are very few thoughts, even the simplest, which cannot be expressed in various ways. By a judicious mingling of simple and compound, simple and complex, complex and compound sentences, by the substitution of a participial phrase for a subordinate clause, and in a hundred other ways, the structure and length of the sentence may be suitably varied.

Other things being equal, especially if clearness be

not sacrificed, a short sentence is preferable to a long one, for it requires much less close attention on the part of the reader. On the other hand, the long sentence has the advantage over the short one that it does the work of several of these, and that, despite the added strain of attention demanded by it, yet it groups and classifies the thoughts, forms them into a larger unit, and thereby imposes less strain on the memory of the reader.

### Emphasis

In speaking it is easy to emphasise a particular part of our thoughts by simply raising the voice or by making a gesture at the appropriate moment; in writing we cannot do either of these things, so that we are obliged to have recourse to other means of giving emphasis.

The chief of these, though not the only one, is word order, which may be so manipulated as to attract the attention of the reader. It is also possible to emphasise by such typographical devices as italicising, capitalising, thick or spaced printing, headlines, and so on, most of which are extraordinary devices best avoided. Variation of word order, on the other hand, is, under most circumstances, a perfectly legitimate means of emphasis. Generally speaking, the emphasis thus secured rests upon the psychological law that what is new is interesting and catches our attention. The novelty in this case consists in placing a word or a group of words in a position where they are not normally found. A word thus rendered conspicuous attracts the attention as surely as would the appearance of a man playing golf in evening dress. It is not that the word—or the

evening dress—is conspicuous or emphatic in itself, but only in the particular surroundings. It is of the nature of the emphasis which arises from a variation of the normal word order that it is due to novelty; hence it is important that this means of giving emphasis should not be abused, for to emphasise too much is to make the departure from the normal no longer unusual—that is to say, it would defeat its own purpose.

The possible variations of word order are countless, and it would be vain to attempt any classification of them. They are different in the simple, in the compound, and in the complex sentence; but they have this in common: that they consist in the removal of the part to be emphasised from its normal position "to a position where it will at once catch the eye. Certain general tendencies may be noted, especially in simple sentences.

The normal word order of the simplest form of sentence is: Subject, Verb, Object or Complement. The commonest variation of this order for the purpose of emphasis is the inversion of subject and verb, in which case, except in poetry, the verb is usually preceded by some adverbial modifier: "First on our programme comes Home Rule." In this sentence the word *first* is emphasised by being taken out of its weak and unemphatic position in the middle of the sentence and placed in an emphatic position at the head of the sentence. In the same way any other change of the normal order attracts attention. Almost any word may be taken out of its place and put at the head of the sentence in order to make it more emphatic. For example:

*Adverbs, Adverbial Phrases*: "Never have I seen

the like." "From the halls of the Vatican to the most secluded hermitages of the Apennines, the great revival was everywhere heard and seen."

*Complement*: "Foremost among them in zeal and devotion was Gian Pietro Caraffa, afterwards Pope Paul IV."—*Macaulay*.

*Adverbial Clause*: "Wherever the Jesuit preached, the church was too small for the audience."

The most emphatic positions in the sentence are the beginning and the end, for which reason it is necessary to consider well, before writing a sentence, which are the important elements, and to take care that they always occupy these emphatic positions. Since the subject and predicate are the parts without which no sentence can exist, these are generally the most important, and for this reason the emphatic positions are given to them, the beginning being usually allotted to the subject and the end position to the predicate. Sometimes, however, the subject is placed at the end, as in the sentence already quoted from Macaulay. So also: "There is not, and there never was, on this earth, a work of human policy so well deserving of examination as the Roman Catholic Church."

When the predicate consists of more than one statement, it is desirable to reserve the end position for the most important one. For example, the sentence, "The aim of the Association is to give working men a sound education, not to help them to rise out of their class," might, from this point of view, be rewritten, "The aim of the Association is, not to help working men to rise out of their class, but to give them a sound education," if, as is assumed here, the last clause is the one which

is the more important from the point of view of the speaker.

Emphasis may be secured by other means than by a variation of the normal word order. Another very common means is repetition, as, for instance, in such lines as :

“ Break, break, break, on thy cold grey stones, O sea ! ”

or, “ Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on a wide, wide sea.”

Of a similar nature are the numerous phrases, many of them alliterative or assonantic, which abound in our language, such as *house and home, lock and stock, might and main, heart and soul, each and every*, and many more which emphasise by a repetition of the thought in a somewhat changed form. Akin to this form of emphasis is the kind of repetition which consists in a summing up of a number of subjects by *these, such*, etc. (cf. p. 107).

It is not possible to say for all cases which is the more emphatic position, beginning or end, since a good deal depends on what has to be said. It is commonly asserted that the end position is the more emphatic, but there are certainly exceptions to this rule. It is quite natural, for example, that by springing an idea suddenly on the attention of the reader at the beginning of the sentence his attention is often secured quite as effectually as by keeping him in suspense for it until he comes to the end of the sentence. For this reason the front position is almost invariably taken by exclamations, and it is also used for certain adverbs of mood, such as *yes, no, certainly*.

Besides these changes of word order there are other devices which secure emphasis. One of these is to precede the emphatic words by *it is* or *it was*—e.g. “It was the firemen who came to the rescue.”

(Of the value of antithesis in giving emphasis, compare p. 143.)

### Kinds of Sentences

Grammar recognises three kinds of sentence—the simple, the compound, and the complex; rhetoric cuts across this classification, and speaks of the periodic, loose, and balanced sentence. We shall consider them here in the order given.

The short simple sentence is direct and emphatic, especially emphatic when it comes in contrast to a number of longer ones, as in the following example :

“To borrow the fine imagery of one who had himself been thus tried, he emerges from the Valley of the Shadow of Death, from the dark land of gins and snares, of quagmires and precipices, of evil spirits and ravenous beasts. *The sunshine is on his path.* He ascends the Delectable Mountains, and catches from their summit a distant view of the shining city which is the end of his pilgrimage.”

The short sentence is very often, and quite appropriately, used at the beginning of a paragraph, to introduce the subject; or at the end of the paragraph, to sum up or emphasise the thought that has been developed. For example :

“*Far different is the policy of Rome.* The ignorant enthusiast whom the Anglican Church makes an enemy,

and, whatever the polite and learned may think, a most dangerous enemy, the Catholic Church makes a champion. She bids him nurse his beard, covers him with a gown and hood of coarse dark stuff, ties a rope round his waist, and sends him forth to teach in her name. He costs her nothing, he takes not a ducat away from the revenues of her beneficed clergy. He lives by the alms of those who respect his spiritual character, and are grateful for his instructions," etc.

Both the compound and the complex sentence are of the nature of economisers. By avoiding the repetition of the subject or of the verb, they economise words; by dovetailing the various component thoughts of a sentence, or sentences, into a larger unit, they economise mental effort. The complex or compound sentence stands in much the same relation to the simple sentences out of which it is built as a machine stands to its component parts. These latter may be in every way perfect as parts, but may nevertheless become much more serviceable when they are assembled in the complete machine. The compound or complex sentence gives the reader a more comprehensive view of the idea or ideas which are presented to him; it enables him to see them in their entirety, and in their relation one to another. The reader is saved the mental effort of ordering his impressions, and is therefore able more easily to understand what he reads.

The best way to demonstrate this is to take a number of simple sentences and then to weld them together into a complex or compound sentence, and to note the

economy which is effected by the change. For example, the sentences :

“It appears that Shakespeare had experience of and commerce with men. This experience was common both to Goethe and Scott. Shakespeare agrees with the latter rather than with the former in the kind and species of that experience”

may be welded together so as to read :

“It appears that Shakespeare not only had that various experience of and commerce with men which was common both to Goethe and to Scott, but also that he agrees with the latter rather than with the former in the kind and species of that experience”

The latter form of the sentence is superior to the former in many ways. It is more easily understood by the reader, because it runs more smoothly, and more particularly because it places the various elements in their right relation one to another, and at the same time secures a proper distribution of emphasis. In the first version each of the separate sentences had equal value, but in the compound sentence those elements which are really only of secondary importance are subordinated, with the result that the main thought is made more prominent.

The compound sentence is, indeed, merely a means of showing that two or more ideas together form a larger idea, and are not merely detached and unrelated. As a rule, the relation between the parts of a compound sentence is clearly pointed out by the conjunction which joins them, though this is not always the case. *And* merely indicates that the two thoughts it connects are



to be taken together as parts of a more comprehensive thought; *but* leads us to expect a contrast; *since*, a reason; *or*, an alternative. Sometimes, again, the conjunction has to be supplied, as in the sentence, "To err is human, to forgive divine."

It follows from this that the misuse of conjunctions is the result of unclear thought, for such misuse shows that the writer has not made clear to himself the exact relation of the various thoughts which he expresses. The most common example of this weakness is to be found in the use of *and* to do duty for all the rest of the conjunctions, an error which is doubtless to no little extent confirmed by the looseness with which this little word is used in the spoken language. Such sentences as "He went out without his overcoat and caught cold" contains such a generally accepted and convenient idiom that there seems scarcely any point in protesting against it. Few people would be willing to sacrifice it for the longer and more exact:

"In consequence of } going out without his overcoat,  
 "As a result of }  
 he caught cold."

The compound sentence is used to show that two or more ideas, in themselves of equal value and independent, are to be taken together. The complex sentence, on the other hand, is used in order to show that one of two or more ideas of unequal value stands in a certain relation of subordination to the other, and to bring that relation to the mind of the reader. It is a reflection of the complexity of our thought, and is often misused simply because that complexity has not been clearly thought out by the writer. The sources of error

in this respect are twofold : either the writer has not a just appreciation of the value of the subordinating conjunctions, or he puts the main idea in the subordinate clause, and *vice versa*. Examples of the misuse of conjunctions have already been mentioned, as also an example of placing the main thought in the subordinate clause : " Mr. Lloyd-George entered the hall when the audience cheered."

An error of a different though not less serious kind is the piling up of clause after clause, each referring to the preceding clause instead of to the principal one, in the manner of the rime of *The House that Jack built*.

### The Period

The kind of sentence known as the period is so constructed that the sense is not complete until the very last word of the sentence has been reached. The special value of a sentence thus constructed is that it holds to the end the attention of the reader, who must wait for the last words before he sees the point of those which have preceded. His curiosity is aroused at the beginning of the sentence, but is not satisfied until the last possible moment. In such a sentence as " When at last the train did arrive, it was full," the reader's curiosity is awakened by the opening clause ; he wishes to know what happened when the train arrived. This information, however, is withheld as long as possible in order to heighten the effect when finally it is given. The opposite of the period is the so-called " loose " sentence, a term which is purely technical, and does not imply any sort of defect in the sentence. The loose sentence differs from the periodic sentence in that it

runs on after the main point has been communicated, and is thus, in a slight degree, of the nature of an anticlimax. The above sentence, converted into a loose sentence, would read: "The train was full when at last it did arrive." Here the sense is complete after the statement that the train was full, and everything that is added contributes information of only secondary importance.

In the periodic sentence all modifiers, subordinate clauses, etc., are placed first, in order that the sentence may end with the important point, so that in one sense the periodic sentence is also a means of securing emphasis. But besides being emphatic, the periodic sentence tends to prevent incoherence and the use of incomplete constructions; for in order to place all the less important parts of the sentence before the emphatic part, the writer is compelled to arrange his matter carefully and to analyse his thought to such an extent that he is conscious himself of what is the relative importance of the several parts. Hence the periodic sentence, while checking incoherence and irrelevance, is also a valuable help in securing unity. The following sentence affords a good example of a more prolonged period:

"If the Patriarch of the Holy Philosophical Church had contented himself with making jokes about Saul's asses and David's wives, and with criticising the poetry of Ezekiel with the same narrow spirit in which he criticised that of Shakespeare, the Church would have had little to fear."

The periodic sentence is really only the location of the rule that modifiers and adju

be placed before the word or words they modify. The chief cases are the following :

1. Adverbs, adverbial clauses or phrases may precede :

“In the very year when the Saxons, maddened by the exactions of Rome, broke loose from her yoke, the Spaniards, under the authority of Rome, made themselves masters of the empire and of the treasures of Montezuma.”

“When words are in demand to express a long course of thought, when they have to be conveyed to the ends of the earth, or perpetuated for the benefit of posterity, they must be written down.”

2. Participial phrases may precede :

“Granting what you say, we are still unwilling to allow this course.”

“Supposing it to be true, what will happen?”

“Having finished our work, we returned home.”

3. A conditional clause or a clause of reason may precede :

“Now if such declamation, for declamation it is, however noble, be allowable in a poet, whose genius is so far removed from pompousness or pretence, much more is it allowable in an orator,” etc.

“Were not this astonishing doctrine maintained by persons far superior to the writer whom I have selected for animadversion, I should find it difficult to be patient under a gratuitous extravagance.”

“And since the thoughts and reasonings of an author have, as I have said, a personal character, no wonder that his style is not only the image of his subject, but also the image of his mind.”

In order to see how much may be gained by the periodic sentence, it is only necessary to convert one of the above examples into a loose sentence and to compare the two forms.

Periodicity may also be secured by the use of a number of pairs of correlative words, the first of which leads us to expect the other, and thus keeps the mind in suspense until it is reached. Such correlatives are, among others :

either . . . or	neither . . . nor
both . . . and	not only . . . but also
that . . . which	the . . . who, that, which
so . . . as, that	as . . . as
such . . . as, that	more . . . than
if . . . then	firstly . . . secondly
not . . . but	though . . . yet
on the one hand . . . on the other hand, etc.	

*Nor* may also lead the mind forward to the next sentence, and is thus a valuable sentence link. For example:

“Nor were the calamities of the Church confined to France. The revolutionary spirit, attacked by all Europe, beat all Europe back, became conqueror in its turn, and, not satisfied with the Belgian cities and the rich domains of the spiritual Electors, went raging over the Rhine and through the passes of the Alps.”

The loose sentence is more common than the period, probably because it allows of greater modification and variety of structure.

### The Balanced Sentence

The balanced sentence is one in which the parts or clauses are constructed on a similar plan. The simplest example of the balanced sentence is in the form, “To

err is human, to forgive divine," where we find the same word order, the same parts of speech, and the same form of the verb. The great advantage of this form of sentence is that it is conducive to clearness, and, notwithstanding its somewhat artificial structure, to simplicity. For it is obvious that when two clauses or parts of a sentence are built up in the same way it will be easier to understand them. After the first part of the sentence has been read, all that the mind has to do in the rest of the sentence is to substitute certain new terms, without the additional effort of thinking out their relation. Hence the more one clause resembles another the clearer it is, and the less there is to remember. Moreover, as Bain points out, a balanced sentence has the merit of placing the thoughts side by side, in exactly the same form, for comparison, so that there is no necessity to make any mental readjustment of the ideas before the comparison can be made. The balanced sentence is forceful and direct, especially in short sentences, as, for example, in proverbs and common sayings. Its advantages are also such as to lend themselves very readily to the requirements of epigram: "Man proposes, God disposes"; "Set a thief to catch a thief"; "God made the country and man made the town," etc.

More frequently the balanced sentence is a compound sentence, of which the clauses are similar in construction; though it is possible to have balance in the simple sentence, also, especially where correlatives are used. Examples of different kinds of balanced sentences are:

"He acted more from pity than from sympathy."  
Here the balance is secured, and the sentence improved,

by the repetition of *from* before *sympathy*. Similarly the sentence, "His work is both admirable in the matter and the manner," is better written, "His work is admirable both in the matter and in the manner."

"Thus while the Protestant reformation proceeded rapidly at one extremity of Europe, the Catholic revival went on as rapidly at the other."

A more elaborate balance is to be found in the following sentence :

"The war between Luther and Leo was a war between firm faith and unbelief, zeal and apathy, between energy and indolence, between seriousness and frivolity, between a pure morality and vice."

In conclusion it may be added that the balanced sentence is also agreeable to the ear, since its regular structure is attended by a more or less regular rhythm. For this reason also it becomes monotonous if it is used too much.

## CHAPTER V

### WORD ORDER

THE order of words in a sentence is partly a matter of grammar and partly a matter of style. In the latter case the requirements of emphasis, etc., assert themselves, and on this point more is said elsewhere.

The most important principles in the arrangement of words in the sentence are the following :

1. The most important elements are placed either at the beginning or at the end of the sentence.
2. Modifying words are placed as near as possible to the words they modify.
3. Words that are used as connectives or links are generally in the front position.

With reference to the first of these principles, it has already been pointed out, in the section on emphasis, that the most important position is the end, though under certain conditions the beginning may be equally emphatic. It follows from these principles that the middle of the sentence should be reserved for the less important parts of the sentence—*e.g.* “Lord Roberts on Friday visited Windsor Castle.”



The second of the above general principles relates to the position in the sentence of the modifiers either of nouns or of verbs. The general rule with reference to the modifiers of nouns is that, if there are several of them, the one that is most intimately associated in meaning with the noun comes nearest to it, as, for example, "a conceited young man," where *young* and *man* are so closely associated in sense that we might replace them by the single word *youth*. For this reason adjectives are placed nearer to the nouns they modify than are numerals, articles, pronominal adjectives, etc.—e.g. "many young people," "those stone houses," etc. In the arrangement of the modifiers and adjuncts of verbs there is much more latitude than in the case of the modifiers of nouns, because there is much greater difficulty in deciding on the degree of intimacy with which they are associated with the verb. Indeed this can vary according to the meaning which the writer wishes to convey. One may say, however, that objects stand in a more intimate relation to their verbs than do adverbial modifiers, and hence the latter never stand between a verb and its object. We say, for example, "I saw your father in the street," and not, "I saw in the street your father." So also prepositional objects usually follow non-prepositional objects—e.g. "They accused him of falsehood," "They gave the commission to him." The arrangement of other kinds of modifiers depends almost entirely on the meaning which has to be conveyed, and no formal rules can be laid down.

The omission to place adjuncts as near as possible to the words they modify is a frequent source of ambiguity,

and may even result in absurdity. Such a sentence as the following is misleading :

“As the leading exponent of Liberal principles, I hope you will allow me to urge the importance of this matter.”

The writer means :

“As the leading exponent of Liberal principles, you will, I hope, allow me to urge the importance of this matter.”

Many are the examples of the ludicrous effects of a misarrangement of words in a sentence. For example :

“He committed suicide at eleven o'clock, after saying good-bye to his wife, with a gun.”

There is one important exception to the rule that adjective modifiers should precede their noun, and that is when the modifier is itself further modified by a word or phrase—*e.g.* “This is a problem too pressing to be delayed.”

So also when a noun is modified by several adjectives, it is sometimes better to place some before and some after—*e.g.* “He was a friend of all men, young and old, rich and poor.”

It should be noticed, too, that the actual meaning of a word may change when it changes its position. Notice, for example, the difference of meaning in “He did it alone” and “He alone did it.” Similarly with *cheap* and *dear* and other words. “They bought the material dear” is not the same thing as “They bought dear material.”

There is also an important exception to the rule that prepositional objects follow other objects. If, for example, the non-prepositional object itself has modifiers,

it must come last—*e.g.* “They accused ‘of falsehood him whom they had thought the fountain of honour.”

Adverbs, except *enough*, precede the word they modify, if it is any other part of speech than a verb. If it is a verb, adverbs, except adverbs of time, follow the transitive verb, and follow or precede both verb and object if the verb is transitive :

“He was very anxious.”

“He stood some distance away from me.”

“He went away soon after seven.”

“He always got up unwillingly.”

“He never danced well.”

“It is good enough.”

“We expect him home again to-morrow.”

The third main principle mentioned above was that link words, such as conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs, should have front position. This is only natural, since in this position the function of such words is most clearly seen. Included among such link words are, of course, also relative pronouns : “The books which I received were soiled.” “He is poor but honest.”

Similarly, other words or groups of words which link sentences should be placed at the beginning of the sentence. We say, for example, “The next day he left for the Continent,” in which sentence the opening words show that the narrative is being continued. Under ordinary circumstances we should not place such an adverbial phrase in this position unless there were some special reason for making it emphatic—*e.g.* “We are leaving for the Continent to-morrow.” Similarly, “Here he paused in his speech,” as compared with “I should very much like to pause here.”

When the subject has a number of modifiers and the verb has none, it is often well to place the verb, preceded by an adverb, first, and then the subject with its modifiers: "He who ventures into such dangerous places unaccompanied, and with the knowledge that he risks his life, is a brave man," might be rewritten, "He is a brave man who," etc., or, "Brave is the man who," etc. Similarly, "The difficulty that if we pass this measure we shall be committed to many more similar measures now arises," would be better, "Now arises the difficulty that," etc.

A relative pronoun should be placed as near as possible to its antecedent. "I have read the latest despatches from China and India, which have just arrived," is better written, "I have read the latest despatches, which have just arrived, from China and India."

A pronoun of the first person should be mentioned after a pronoun of the second or third person. "Please send me and my brother (and him) a copy," "Neither I nor you can afford it," should have the order of the pronouns and noun changed.

An adverb qualifying the whole of a clause or sentence is best placed at the head, since in that position it commands the whole of the sentence: "Unhappily, these occurrences are all too common."

Care should be taken in placing the word *only*, since it modifies the following word:

"I only tried to play the piano."

"I tried only to play the piano."

"I tried to play only the piano."

These three sentences have different meanings.

Prepositions, unless they form a very close union with the verb, should not be placed last in the sentence: "They scarcely realise what they lay themselves open to."

A clause should not be so placed that there is doubt as to which clause the next verb belongs: "He rushed into the room where the family usually sat, and shouted fire." "

A relative clause should be placed, if possible, immediately after its antecedent: "A search has been instituted for Mr. B., son of the well-known solicitor of this town, who has been missing for several weeks." It is Mr. B., and not the well-known solicitor, who has been missing.

### Inversion

When the subject is placed after the verb instead of before it, the order is said to be inverted. Inversion may be due either to the necessities of syntax or to the desire to emphasise certain elements of the sentence. It should be borne in mind, in making use of inversion, that the order is an unusual order, and that therefore those parts of the sentence which are taken out of their normal position and placed elsewhere are thereby rendered emphatic. Hence inversion should not be made unless it is really desired to emphasise the parts of the sentence which are put at the head of the sentence, and which oust the subject from its normal emphatic position at the head of the sentence.

Inversion is syntactically necessary when the sentence begins with a negative adverbial adjunct or conjunction, or with one or other of the adverbs

*hardly, little, only, rarely, scarcely, seldom*, which imply a negation :

“Never before and never again, while Tom was at school, did the doctor strike a boy in a lesson.”

“Nowhere have these complaints been louder, and in no case, we are bound to say, have they been more just, than in the case of the China trade.”

“Hardly ever has a vote of censure, moved by the Opposition, attracted so little attention either inside the House or out-of-doors.”

“And seldom had small boys more need of a friend. Warrington blushed hugely. Neither did Miss Bell speak.”

“Only once during dinner was there any conversation that included the young gentleman.”

In subordinate sentences also inversion is necessary under these conditions :

“The truth is that rarely in the history of our political life has an Opposition been in such sore straits, or so gravelled for lack of controversial matter.”

“It would appear that until Tuesday was he compelled to keep within doors.”

Inversion of the rhetorical kind is found in such sentences as :

“In the year 1748 died one of the most powerful of the new masters of India.”

“Soon after began the busy and important part of Swift’s life.”

In neither of these sentences is the inversion of subject and verb necessary, as it was in the sentences given above. It is quite correct to say, “Soon after the busy

part of Swift's 'life began," though it is not so good. It is clear, then, that the inversion is due to other causes than the exigencies of grammar, the reason being, no doubt, that the writer wished to emphasise the subject of the sentence by placing it last in the sentence. This, however, could not be done without putting the adverbial adjuncts first; for it is not possible, in prose, to say, "died in the year 1748 one of the most powerful of the new masters of India."

Inversion of this kind is frequently made in order to protect the subject, or in order not to place the weakest words in the most emphatic position at the end: "He had written good poetry, as Huxley had also." In this sentence *also* is unduly emphasised, so that a better order would be: "He had written poetry, as also had Huxley."

The chief cases in which inversion is necessary, apart from the case already mentioned, are:

1. When the complement of the verb *to be* is placed at the head of the sentence, the subject and verb must be inverted:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

"Such were the circumstances under which Lora Clive sailed for the third and last time to India."

2. In optative sentences:

"May every blessing wait on my Beverley."

## CHAPTER VI

### QUALITIES OF THE SENTENCE

EVEN when the words of a sentence have been arranged in accordance with the rules of syntax, and have been grouped so as to secure emphasis, there still remain certain qualities which deserve attention. The chief of these are the qualities of brevity, simplicity, directness, euphony, and impressiveness.

#### **Brevity**

Brevity consists in the economy of words. If a thought can be expressed in ten words, it is wasteful to use twenty. The offences against brevity are known under many names, but they all have the feature in common that a thing is expressed more fully than it need be. The difference between redundancy, tautology, and circumlocution is mainly one of degree. In the following sentence of Swift, "In the Attic Commonwealth it was the privilege and birthright of every citizen and poet to read aloud and in public," the words *privilege* and *birthright* are tautologous, since *birthright* includes *privilege*, just as *citizen* includes *poet*, and *public*, *aloud*. Another kind of tautology is found where the same word is repeated, though this, as we have



seen, may be perfectly justified. Much more common is the kind of superfluity which goes under the name of pleonasm, which consists in the use of unnecessary words with different grammatical functions. Pleonastic are such expressions as *to return again, to renew again, after the collision occurred, to revive to 'life*, and many more.

Much more difficult to correct than either tautology or pleonasm is circumlocution or verbosity, which consists in the use of phrases where single words would do, and of clauses where a phrase would convey all the meaning necessary. Circumlocution of this kind tends to develop into the worse faults of incoherence and lack of unity; it therefore perplexes the reader, and, by reason of its saying so little in so many words, both disappoints and fatigues him. Circumlocution, as distinct from mere incoherence, abounds in the writings of Hooker, from which a passage is here printed :

“ But for the present, so much all do acknowledge, that sith every man's heart and conscience doth in good or evil, even secretly committed and known to none but itself, either like or disallow itself, and accordingly either rejoice, very nature exulting as it were in certain hope of reward, or else grieve as it were in a sense of future punishment, neither of which can be looked for from any other, saving only from him who discerneth and judgeth the very secrets of all hearts; therefore he is the only rewarder and revenger of all such actions; although not of such actions only, but of all whereby the law of nature is broken, whereof himself is sole author.”

The first condition of economy of language is, of course, economy of thought; but given a thought, or a group of thoughts, there are always several ways of expressing it, and it is here that purely grammatical means of securing brevity may prove of use. The chief of these are:

1. To use the shortest word that will serve the purpose. It is a waste, at least, to call a tailor a sartorial artist.

2. To use a noun instead of a phrase or a clause. "Then begins the time when we wilfully delude ourselves" may be more briefly expressed: "Then begins our time of wilful delusion." Or "the fact of his having departed" may be converted into "his departure."

3. To use a noun as an adjective, in order to obviate the use of a phrase or clause: *Sunday school, waterproof, rose red.*

4. To use adjectival or adverbial phrases which render meaning concisely: *On demand, by request*, etc.

5. To use an adjective instead of a phrase or clause. "A survey carefully carried out would reveal all this" might be written: "A careful survey would reveal all this."

6. To use a participial phrase instead of a full clause: "Encouraged by this reception" = "As he was encouraged by this reception."

7. By the use of prefixes, suffixes, and compound words: *replace* = *to put back again*, *recover* = *to get back again*, etc.; *narrow-*, *broad-minded*, etc.; *foolish* = *like a fool*, *ex-president* = *one who was president*.

8. By the use of figures of speech, especially of metaphor: "Language is an organism." "The hue of truth was in the picture."

9. By using a condensed type of sentence: "He hoped for, but did not expect, the honour."

10. By apposition: "My brother, the doctor" = "My brother, who is a doctor."

In aiming at brevity care should be taken not to condense too much, for this leads to obscurity. One of the most condensed styles among modern English writers is perhaps that of Meredith. Any page almost of his work will show numerous examples of economy of words, and also not a few examples of over-condensation leading to obscurity. A typical sentence is:

"Mrs. Mountstuart detested the analysis of her sentence. It had an outline in vagueness and was flung out to be apprehended, not dissected."

Another passage from the same author will illustrate some of the gains and losses from brevity and economy of expression:

"Patience travelled back to her sullenly. As we must have some kind of food, and she had nothing else, she took to that and found it dryer than of yore. It is a composing but lean dietary. The dead are patient, and we get a certain likeness to them in feeding on ~~is~~ unintermittingly over-long. Her hollowed cheeks with the fallen leaf in them pleaded against herself to justify her idol for not looking down on one like her."

### Simplicity

Simplicity touches at more than one point on brevity. A sentence which contains unnecessary circumlocutions cannot lay claim to the merit of simplicity. But the principle of simplicity is concerned rather with the

manner than with the length of an expression. The sentences :

“The peculiar angle of the earth’s axis to the plane of the ecliptic—that angle which is chiefly responsible for our geography and therefore for our history—had caused the phenomenon known in London as summer. The whizzing globe happened to have turned its most civilised face away from the sun, thus producing night in Selwood Terrace, South Kensington.”

are not brief; they do not say what they want to say in the fewest words; but they are not simple either. They say a good deal more than is necessary, which is a fault; but they also say it in a manner that savours of affectation, which is an even greater fault. So far as one can see, nothing would have been lost, and much would have been gained, by writing simply :

“One summer night in Selwood Terrace, South Kensington.”

On the other hand, these two sentences, with slight modification, might pass very well in a popular lecture on astronomy. In such a setting they would be simple enough, and they would not say anything more than was necessary, unless, indeed, the details of place were regarded as superfluous. Standing where they do, however (at the opening of a novel), they are unsuited to the subject-matter.

The fact that one and the same sentence may be both simple and affected according to its setting, makes it clear that simplicity is something relative. It consists in making a thought as easily intelligible as possible without sacrifice of any essential element of the thought.

But to make a thing easily intelligible one has to bear in mind two things: first, the extent to which it has to be rendered intelligible; and second, the person to whom it has to be rendered intelligible. Summer and night are not the same thing to the scientist and to the market-gardener; the former requires these two phenomena to be described with much greater accuracy, if he is to understand them in his character of scientist, than is required by the latter in his capacity as a market-gardener. The degree of simplicity required depends, therefore, on the purpose of the statement. But it also depends on the person to whom the statement is made. The simplicity of a lecture to a learned society is not the simplicity of a lecture to a popular audience, and the difference is the difference in the audience. The one requires a precision of terminology only to be rendered by the use of words which would be unintelligible to the other.

These are extreme cases, of course, but they serve to illustrate the point under discussion. In other cases, where the contrast of purpose and audience is not so strong, the only sound rule to follow is to use the simplest expression which will, all the circumstances being considered, give adequate expression to the thought. Sometimes simplicity is not possible, or it may conflict with some other necessity of style, so that one quality will have to be sacrificed to another. The sentence, "Aged military veterans whose breasts were covered with medals saluted Mr. Oxford as he entered," is not a simple way of saying that commissioners greeted him as he entered, and the simpler expression says all that is necessary under the circumstances.

But, on the other hand, when Meredith wishes to give a mental picture of Napoleon, he does so in a manner which is not simple, but which could not be changed without the loss of the greater part of the meaning: " . . . the nod of extinction to thousands, the great orb of darkness, the still trembling gloomy quiver—the brain of the lightning of battles."

The practical question which the writer has to answer for himself is whether the simple expression (which is usually the short one) conveys the meaning as well as the more abstruse one (which is usually the longer one). Other things being equal, a short word or phrase or sentence is to be preferred to a long one; a concrete term is better than an abstract one, a native word better than a foreign one, and a familiar better than an unfamiliar term. There is no advantage in calling a flower-show a horticultural exhibition.

But simplicity is not only a matter of the choice of words, it also largely depends on the arrangement of the words in the sentence, and on the general structure of the sentence. Complex or periodic sentences are not so simple as compound, or loose, or balanced sentences. So also the change of position of a single word may make the meaning much more easily appear. For example, "I pretend to no special knowledge of the case," is not so simple as "I do not pretend to any . . ."; and in many more cases the sentence is more or less simple according to the position of the negative.

Closely allied to simplicity is the quality of directness, which consists in the avoidance of allusion—especially of such hackneyed allusions as *the swan of Avon*, *Macaulay's*

*schoolboy*—and of unnecessarily numerous quotations. Lack of directness is also often caused by the use of pointless metaphors and other figures of speech, and by the habit of describing things in indirect terms, as, for example, in the sentences quoted at the beginning of this section. Allusions, quotations, and figures of speech are, of course, not necessarily inimical to directness; they may be, especially in the case of figures of speech, the only way of conveying the sense. In such cases, and when they really illumine the thought, or complete or confirm it in some way, they may be valuable aids to expression.

### **Strength or Impressiveness**

A sentence may be clear, simple, direct, without being forceful or impressive. Impressiveness consists in something over and above those qualities, in an added something which makes a deeper impression on the mind than any of them can do. In the spoken language, words are made more impressive by being spoken in a louder voice, with a different tone, or with an accompanying gesture, but these means are not possible in the written language. Hence other means have to be used. One of these has already been discussed in the section on Emphasis, for emphasis is one part of impressiveness.

The first necessity for impressiveness is that the thought itself should be impressive. If that is given, the thought may be expressed in such a way as to increase or diminish its force. But if the original thought is not itself strong, no rhetorical device can ever make it so. A strong thought can only retain

its strength if it is placed in a strong position and is properly supported by the surrounding thoughts. Hence one method of securing impressiveness is climax, just as a sure way of defeating it is anti-climax. Other effects which may be obtained by a suitable grouping of words have already been discussed in the section on word order and in the section on the structure of the paragraph, but one or two of them deserve to be mentioned again in this connection.

A thought is more impressive when it is striking, and it is most striking when it is either isolated or in strong contrast. Hence one method of rendering a thought strongly is to isolate it. This may be done by making a single sentence constitute a paragraph; or it may be done by placing a short sentence among a number of long ones, or a long one among a number of short ones, though in this case the force of contrast is also felt. Contrast as a means to impressiveness may be achieved either in the manner just mentioned, or else by so arranging the sentences that one is the antithesis of the other.

Sometimes impressiveness is achieved not so much by the grouping of the parts of the sentence as by the right use of words. Mere weight and sound and volume of words may give great strength and dignity to a thought, as may be seen, for example, by an examination of the poetry of Milton. By weight of words is not meant the mere accumulation of empty words or of far-fetched and laboured expressions. These weaken a sentence much more than they strengthen it.



**Euphony**

The last quality of the sentence to be considered is euphony. A sentence, besides having meaning, has also sound, and the relation between the sound and the sense may be more or less close. The sound of a sentence may be considered either from the point of view of the separate sounds, or from the point of view of the collective sounds,—that is to say, from the point of view of the agreeableness of the separate sounds, or from the point of view of their collective rhythm. That a sentence should read well, that it should be pleasant to the ear, is obvious, but that prose has its rhythm as well as verse is not so generally recognised. It is thought that, since the great majority of modern prose is written to be read in silence, the sound and rhythm of the sentence is not of very great importance; and doubtless this fact accounts for the modern neglect of harmony in the sentence. But nevertheless there is just as much necessity for it in prose which is only to be read in silence as there is for it in prose which is intended to be read aloud; for in reading to oneself one is obliged to pick out the relative force and stress of the parts, the word and sentence stress, as in reading aloud. If we examine what happens in ordinary speech, this will become abundantly clear. In the spoken language we understand what is meant only because certain parts of the sentence and certain syllables of the word are spoken with greater stress than others, or with a different tone. If this were not so, we should be obliged to give equal attention to every syllable, even to every separate sound in the sentence, and then at the end carefully to reconstruct the meaning from

the elements. Word and sentence stress save us all this trouble. These emphasise those parts of the sentence and of the word to which attention should be specially directed. The rest of the sentence, the relatively unstressed parts, is more or less insignificant; it consists of link words, modifiers, and so on, without which the sentence can generally be understood. The framework of the sentence is brought more conspicuously before our consciousness by means of the stress, and what is left comes into our consciousness in a less marked way. That this is so may be proved by a very simple experiment: Take any two or three sentences of prose, and read them aloud, word by word, with absolutely even stress on each word, and with an absolutely even pause between the words. How much of the sentence can be understood by the person who reads, or by the person who is listening? It will be found that a sentence read in this way will be practically unintelligible. If we were to read the words syllable by syllable as well, the sentence would be wholly unintelligible. In much the same way the present sentence would be unintelligible if it were so printed as to force the reader to pause between each word, and to prevent him from seeing enough words at a single glance to be able to grasp their collective meaning:

In much the same way the present sentence is printed in such a way as to force the reader to pause between each word, etc.

The reason why, in these two cases, we cannot understand what is read or written, is that the life of the sentence has been destroyed. The sentence has lost its

soul: nothing is left but the inanimate, disjointed limbs.

Stress or accent, then, whether in a word or in a group of words, is the life of a sentence. And it is the variation of stress, the rising and falling of the voice, the variation of tone and pause, which make the rhythm of a sentence. All spoken language has rhythm. This rhythm may be regular or irregular. If words are so grouped that the rise and fall of the voice recur at regular intervals, the result is verse rhythm; if the words are so arranged that the recurrence of the rise and fall is not regular, then the result is prose rhythm. The difference between prose and verse rhythm is thus fundamental. Hence, since the nature and function of prose and verse is different, regular rhythm should be avoided in prose. It is, in the first place, inappropriate, because the subject-matter of the majority of prose sentences is not worthy of the dignity which the verse form imparts, and the thought therefore appears incongruous in such a dress. In the second place, a regular rhythm in prose very soon becomes monotonous.

But though the rhythmic elements of prose have not, as yet, been classified as have those of verse,—yet there can be little doubt that they exist. Most good prose has a certain easy flow, which adds greatly to its charm. What that rhythm is can be better heard than explained. It consists partly in the negative quality of avoiding any jars or shocks in the sentence, such as may be caused, for example, by a succession of commas; partly in the positive quality of careful grouping and selection of words so as to give as easy and flowing a rhythm as possible. A succession of too many strongly stressed

syllables—only possible in English if the words are monosyllables—or a succession of too many unstressed syllables, would be equally difficult to pronounce, and would have the effect of breaking the rhythm of the sentence. The same principles are seen at work in the stressing of the syllables of single words. If we say *phótophograph*, but *photógraphy*, this is because it would offend our ears to have three unstressed syllables following *pho*.

Quite different from the euphony which arises from the rhythm of the sentence is the euphony which arises from the agreeableness of the separate sounds. By general consent some sounds are held to be more beautiful than others. Vowels are pleasanter to hear than consonants. Among consonants, *m* and *n*, *l* and *r*, are the most pleasant, because they approach more nearly to the character of the vowels than do any other consonants. So, again, the voiced consonants are more pleasant than the voiceless ones, because they are more sonorous. The least pleasant sounds are probably the gutturals and the hissing sounds (*s*, *f*, *k*, *g*, *th*). Perhaps prose does not offer the same opportunities for sound effects as does verse; at any rate, it is rarely that we get such sonorous lines as,

“Five miles meandering with a mazy motion,”  
or,

“Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on a wide, wide sea.”

Two of the commonest sound effects of this kind are known by the name of *onomatopœia* and *alliteration*. The first of these consists in the deliberate adaptation

of sound to sense. It is more used in poetry than in prose, as, for example :

“The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,  
The furrow followed free :  
We were the first that ever burst  
Into that silent sea.”

or,

“Down dropped the breeze, the sails dropped down ;  
’Twas sad as sad could be,”

in which lines the sounds of the words are imitative of the movements described—in the first place by the repetition of the hissing sounds, and in the second by the repetition of the *d*, *b*, and *p* sounds. . Another kind of onomatopœia is found in those separate words which imitate sounds, such as *buzz*, *swish*, *jingle*, and many more. It should be noted, however, that though words of this kind produce a certain effect, it is not necessarily that of euphony.

Other points which may be borne in mind when aiming at euphony are the following :

1. Avoid the use of the same word twice in the same sentence if it can be avoided without sacrificing clearness. Special forms of this defect are to be seen in the use of the same word in different grammatical functions, or with different meanings. In the latter case confusion is added to unpleasantness of sound. In balanced sentences, however, a word must often be repeated, since it is in the nature of that kind of sentence to repeat certain parts of the sentence. The rule also applies to the repetition of a word in the immediately surrounding sentences. It is just as unpleasant to hear

the same word several times over in two or three consecutive sentences as it is to hear it repeated in the same sentence. This rule should not be interpreted too strictly, for there are numerous occasions, especially in work of an argumentative or expository character, where it is impossible, in the interests of clearness, to vary a word:

“Only if he is the only representative, not much can be done.”

“If necessary, he will make all the necessary arrangements.”

“There is no pronunciation which is accepted throughout the Empire as the best pronunciation. The differences between North and South German pronunciation are quite considerable; and although there is a tendency to set up the pronunciation of the North, and more particularly the pronunciation of Berlin, as the standard pronunciation, yet this tendency is resisted in the South.”

Here *pronunciation* is used much too often.

2. Avoid using in close proximity words which are similar in sound. Under this head comes the use of strings of participles, such as *a law preventing smuggling*, though there are many other forms of this defect—e.g. *a sensitive, sensible man*.

3. Avoid ending a sentence with a weak and empty word. The mind expects the sentence to close on a full note, and is disappointed if the close is weak. Sometimes the weakness arises, not from the lack of meaning or importance of a word, but from its lack of sonorousness. This is especially important in the case of the

periodic sentence, in which the reader is worked up to a climax and requires some substantial support at the end of the sentence :

“ With what vehemence, with what policy, with what exact discipline, with what dauntless courage, with what self-denial, with what forgetfulness of the dearest private ties, with what intense and stubborn devotion to a single end, with what unscrupulous laxity and versatility in the choice of means, the Jesuits fought the battle of their Church, is written in every page of the annals of Europe during several generations.”

How weak this sentence would be, and how disappointing from the point of view of euphony, if it ended with the word *written*, or if *known* were substituted for it. As it stands, the great weight of the introductory suspensive clauses requires some balance, and this balance is given by the words which follow the verb. This sentence might have closed with the word *Europe*, but had it done so the balance would still have been incomplete. On the other hand, if one or two of the suspensive clauses were cancelled, it might be better to close it at *Europe*, for otherwise the final words, *during several generations*, might make the sentence end-heavy.

## CHAPTER VII

### WORDS

THE severest test of style is certainly the use of words. Clearness, euphony, simplicity, directness, emphasis, paragraph structure—all these may be in some measure taught. But with words the case is quite different. When we have said all we can about the classes of words to be avoided, the greater part of style still remains untouched, and, try as we will, we cannot catch its essence, still less analyse it. Nor is this strange. Words are living things: if we isolate them, the life departs from them. If they are not cared for they will lose all their vigour, and they will sicken and die; they will stand there only the meagre skeletons of themselves. But use them well, study their wants, discover their affinities, put them in a congenial atmosphere, and they will thrive and work miracles. There is no word, unless it be some mere relational word, such as a preposition or conjunction, which is not sensitive to its surroundings, and which, like any other living thing, does not react to them and adapt itself to them.

Words as they stand in a dictionary are dead, and, in spite of the columns of meanings attached to them,



are really meaningless. A dictionary is, indeed, like a graveyard: the tombstones tell us who and what the inmates were, when the breath of life was in them, and may even tell us what they would be if they were again quickened into life. But for the present they are safely buried. So it is also with words. Take them out of their grave, join them, and they will spring into life, each yielding strength and force to his fellow. They are, if we may persist in the metaphor, in their animate condition very like human beings; for if you combine a dozen of them, the combination will yield something more than was to be found in the sum of the separate members, in exactly the same way as a dozen men united for a common purpose will create something more than they could have produced individually. The surplus in the first case is suggestion; in the second case it is *esprit de corps*. It is just this subtle word chemistry, this possibility of endless suggestion, this faculty for conjuring up a vast mental imagery, which makes the mastery of the use of words the great and fundamental quality of style. The mastery of the secret inner life of words, then, is the real mystery of style. It cannot be taught; it must be felt. It cannot be analysed, for it is the consequence of the countless millions of associations which are constantly made in the inner recesses of the mind. Thought and personality lie at the bottom of it. When we breathe life into words by combining them to form a sentence, what we really do is to combine our thoughts. A sentence is, therefore, a reflection of a mental process, and there can be no union of words, whether happy or unhappy, which has not this mental activity behind it.

The more associations there are in the mind—that is, the more we think—the more readily thought passes into language, and the more readily words spring up to do their duty.

The great stylists are those who have learnt the secret of the inner meanings of words—of those meanings which fluctuate according to the company they keep. There are some writers who know how to harvest the surplus of meaning which comes from the association of words, and are able to use it to the best advantage. They are the writers who get the maximum of meaning out of every word they use, and who combine them in the way which gives the maximum of suggestion.

The words a writer uses are, in this sense, the biography of his inner life ; they show the circles of thought in which he moves and in which he is most intimate ; for he cannot use a word until it has been thoroughly assimilated and has become a necessary part of his mental equipment. But a word cannot become all this until all its powers and functions are realised to the full, and this is only possible when we have seen the word in all sorts of contexts, with all its possibilities displayed. We must be intimate with each word before we can be sure that it will do exactly the work which we want it to do on a given occasion. Examples of insufficient knowledge of the meaning or meanings, or even of the pronunciation, of a word must be known to every one. It is a common experience, for example, that we grow up with the belief that some word has a particular meaning or a particular pronunciation. We hold this belief until one day we discover that the meaning or pronunciation is in reality slightly different.

Our error is a natural one. It springs from an insufficient knowledge of the word. We learnt it, as we learn the greater number of the words at our command, by reading it in a particular context and by guessing the approximate meaning. We may have met the word again later in another context, in which the meaning which we had first associated with it would still make good sense, though perhaps not quite the sense the writer intended, and thus we became confirmed in our error. Most people doubtless go to their graves with some such mistakes uncorrected, or without discovering them for themselves. But the moral of all this is that such words have not become an integral part of the mental apparatus. They have not been fully assimilated, and their possibilities of meaning have not been explored.

When we say *a dark woman* or *a dark night*, we do not mean the same thing by the word *dark*; the context alone tells us which of the various meanings of the word *dark* is intended. If we say *a dark deed*, we mean something different again. Examples of this kind might easily be multiplied. But what is of importance in these examples is that the changing meaning of the word is the result of the changed context, and is not inherent in the word, as the dictionary might lead us to suppose. This change of meaning of a word is due to the fact that somebody at some time or other happened to think of *dark* and *woman* or *deed* at the same moment, happened to associate them, and therefore joined them together in a sentence. This new use of the word was to this extent a deliberately creative act of the writer, an act of a kind which is occurring every

day. It is in this way that words change their meanings as time goes on, and it is in this way that language adapts itself to ever-changing needs.

But it is not only in the case of individuals that language is a faithful reflection of the inner mind. The whole vocabulary and the syntax of a language is likewise a reflection of the mind of the people which speaks it, and of the age which speaks it. Certain words, as we have already seen, point to certain special physical, mental, or moral conceptions of the race. These conceptions may disappear, and with them the words which embodied them. Others again will stand the wear and tear of time because they have become a necessity, because they stand for ideas which have become indispensable to the race.

It is a natural consequence of the nature and life-history of words that certain groups or classes of them should be more full of meaning than others. This is especially true of words which are in most common use, for they have in the course of time attached to themselves a host of associations, and are therefore exceedingly flexible and suggestive. Such a word is *home*, which we have discussed above; such also are the simple words *strike*, *draw*, and hosts of others in daily use. They are all immediately intelligible, and enter into a large number of convenient and highly expressive idioms. With keeping they have mellowed. They conjure up all sorts of mental and sensual images in a way that the more unfamiliar word can never do; and yet, in spite of their wealth of meaning, in spite of their possibilities of suggestion when used in various contexts, they are never ambiguous, and every one can

use them correctly. These, then, are the familiar words, and because they are richest in meaning they are the words which should be used before all others.

If the familiar word is to be preferred to the unfamiliar because it is richer, the concrete word should be preferred to the abstract on very much the same grounds, and also because it is more precise and more definite in meaning. "Virtue will be rewarded" is not so precise, nor so direct, as "Good men will be rewarded"; it does not make the same appeal to the mind. Both are perhaps equally clear, but the latter is more personal; it makes mention of something which is nearer to our experience of life, and is for that reason alone a stronger expression. It is indeed natural that a concrete word should be more forceful than an abstract one, for the concrete suggests only one thing, but the abstract suggests many, and none of them with the same definiteness as does the concrete term. Of course there are many occasions when the concrete term would not be appropriate, and where any attempt to use it would lead to a long and indirect paraphrase, in which any possible gain in force would be more than counterbalanced by the loss in directness. But though we cannot perhaps substitute *good men* for *virtue*, we can in most cases substitute *walk* or *ride* or some similar term for the abstraction *go*, which may mean any or all of them.

So also, on general grounds of economy and directness, a single word is to be preferred to a circumlocution, if the single word can efficiently do the work of the circumlocution. As an example of this we might take the last clause of the preceding sentence, in which

*provided that* might have been used instead of *if*, though there would not have been any gain in meaning, nor would the meaning have been clearer if this had been done.

Most of the advice given in the text-books of style and composition on the use of words can really be summed up in the words: Prefer the familiar to the unfamiliar word, for the familiar word is generally the shorter one, and is at the same time both native and concrete. As a working rule the advice is sound, but it should not be too slavishly followed; for, in the first place, different kinds of writing require different vocabularies, and, in the second place, variety of words is necessary in all kinds of writing. The scientist, for example, could never do his work properly if he were to be restricted to the use of familiar words, and any writer who used only the shortest possible words would run the risk of being monotonous.

Where a long and a short word, a familiar and an unfamiliar, or a native and a foreign word exist side by side in the language, and the two are synonyms, the difficulty of making a choice may seem to be greater. But in fact the number of real synonyms is very small indeed; the dictionaries of synonyms prove it. We see from them that there is always some slight shade of difference in the meaning of the so-called synonymous words, and it is the mark of the good writer that he is able to turn to profit these fine distinctions and subtle shades of meaning which words afford him. He will not hesitate to use either the long, or the foreign, or the abstract word, if by so doing he is able to bring out his meaning more exactly.

There are occasions, too, when a certain dignity of style is expected. Long words, words of learned formation, are supposed to lend this dignity, and are therefore common in writing of a more formal and ceremonious kind. But whether it is true that the learned words are more dignified than the others is not quite certain. The real source of the dignity of such writing lies rather in the fact that it is written for a dignified occasion. That the simple native words are as dignified as any in our language, is amply proved by the language of the Bible. Probably the real reason why the longer and learned words have the appearance of greater dignity is that, on the occasions when they are felt to be necessary, the thought is usually of a more abstract and general character, for the expression of which the more homely words are inadequate. The dignity lies in the thought, and not in the mere words as words.

Nevertheless there are occasions when the purpose and the circumstances affect the choice of a word, when the neighbouring words will cast their spell, and, it may be, totally change the meaning of the selected word. "The tree is dead" and "Happy are the dead" imply different meanings of *dead*. But when we wish to communicate to somebody that a friend or relative is dead, we prefer to use some other word, for preference a word which is not so direct; instead of "He is dead," we say "He has passed away," or we use some similar euphemism. Expressed differently, there is an emotional foundation in much of what we write, and this emotional foundation largely determines our choice of words, quite apart from whether they are short or long, familiar or unfamiliar. Directness and force are

indeed, sometimes so obviously out of place that we rack our brains to find some less direct and less forceful way of expressing ourselves.

Our choice of words, then, depends partly on the occasion and partly on their fitness or unfitness for a given context. Of the two determining factors, the latter is the more important, for it is words in combination, and not isolated words, which make style. Nobody can teach, or even analyse for himself, the mystery of words in combination. The personal element enters too largely, and where words are most successfully employed they are the expression of a purely personal thought. Thus, for example, if a writer in a recent novel chooses to write of a river winding between lofty warehouses, that it passes through *sixty feet of steep* on both sides, instead of expressing himself in the manner of our paraphrase, it is because in looking at the river and its shores what impresses itself most on his mind is not that there are warehouses on both sides of the river, but that the walls fall sheer into the river. It is the sharp straight lines rising out of the water that impress him most, and in order to render faithfully that impression he takes a liberty with the established use of the word *steep*. He may or may not have been able to express his thought without violating usage, but he deliberately chose this method of expressing it.

This last example leads to another point of view in regarding words. If the above-mentioned writer deliberately used the word *steep* with a new grammatical function and with a slightly changed meaning, what is to be the attitude of the reader to this innovation?



Is he pleased or displeased? Is he willing to accept this modification of usage or not? In other words, what are the extreme limits within which a writer may take liberties with the established usage of the language? May a writer, whenever he chooses, employ an adjective as a noun, or in some other way change the meaning or function of a word? The question cannot be answered dogmatically; but one thing is certain—this is the way in which language develops, words change their meaning, and sentences their syntax. The break with tradition need neither be so sudden nor so violent as in the example given above, but nevertheless the change is always the same in nature. A word is used in a context which gives it a slightly different though still quite clear and intelligible meaning; it is used again and again in this new sense by others until this use becomes generally accepted. The only difficulty is to know how far a writer may go in this respect, and this is a very real difficulty. It is not possible to say “thus far and no further,” for every such innovation will be judged entirely on its own merits. Broadly speaking, he may go as far as his public will go with him. But the question is still not answered: there is only a shifting of the ground; how far will the public go with him? Again, broadly speaking, as far as he is clear and as far as his innovation is felt to be convenient and a real addition to the powers of expression of the language. If the innovation is felt to be all this, it may live, but certainly not otherwise. This is the only limit to the liberty of the author which can be fixed, and it is a very flexible one. A writer who uses words in this way does so at his own risk. Most

writers take the risk—some more, some less—and the measure of their success is seen in the history of change in language.

There are some writers, like Stevenson, who can put their thought into the usual mould; there are others, like Meredith, who must make a new mould for themselves. The one refines the use of that which is already to hand; the other enriches the resources of the language. The one is a classic and a stylist; the other is providing the material which future stylists may use.

The innovations in the uses of words which have been discussed up to the present have all had one feature in common—they were made deliberately. This is something quite different from using a word with a new meaning or with an irregular construction, from negligence, or ignorance, or without adding anything to the meaning. Such innovations can only tend to confuse the reader, for he will understand a word in its normal sense until he sees good reason for doing otherwise. Words thus misused generally intrude on the province of some other word, and thus give rise to the mistaken idea that they are interchangeable, so that in this way the fine shades of distinction in the meanings of words are broken down. Others, again, by being used on all occasions to do the work of half a dozen different words, become themselves meaningless, or else so much weakened in force that a writer finds it better not to use them at all. Such words—usually adjectives—have become so debased that they no longer pass current. *Fine, nice, pretty, awful, terrible, charming*, are examples of words which have suffered this fate.

The fact would seem to be that a writer who is engaged on imaginative work, as distinct from mere formal exposition or argument, must, if he would be true to the impulses within him, at some time or other disregard the laws of his medium and the nature of his audience; for if he does not, the time is sure to come when he will find himself cramped and unable to give full and free expression to his thoughts. The rarer, the more subtle these are, the more difficult they are of expression, and the more difficult it becomes to clip them to suit the laws of grammar and usage. The deeper the thought, the more it penetrates into the vague, impalpable unknown which lies beyond the region of exact knowledge, the less are the ordinary instruments of language adapted to the expression of it. For, after all, the number of words in ordinary use is very strictly limited, as are also the number of normal combinations of words. The number of thoughts, on the other hand, is unlimited. Hence the only way in which language can keep pace with the progress of thought is to make the most use possible of the latent resources of words, of their power to suggest new things when used in new relations and in new contexts.

The particular classes of words against the use of which the novice is generally warned are slang words and phrases, colloquialisms (outside a colloquial text), archaisms, neologisms, and foreign words. The objection to the use of these is not so much that they are unintelligible—many of them are perfectly well understood—as that they are in some way or another inappropriate; either they have not the elements of permanency which we may expect in good writing, or else

they are in some way unsuited to the occasion or to the subject-matter.

• Slang, for example, is not objectionable because it is slang, but because some forms of it are in their tendency opposed to the best interests of the language. But nevertheless slang is, in its origin, just as certainly a creative act as was the use of the word *steep*, in the example discussed above. It should be judged, therefore, from exactly the same point of view as any other innovation: if it is good, it will live; if it is useless, ill-formed, confusing, it will not. A more serious objection to slang is that it is often anti-social in origin and intention. The slang of the public schools, the universities, and certain professional circles is not only not generally understood, but it is used for that very reason. It changes very rapidly, much more rapidly than ordinary speech, simply because those who use it wish to keep themselves socially distinct, and if there is any possibility of their particular jargon being taken up by the general public, they make all haste to change it. But even so the spirit of language may be stronger than they, for if a slang expression once proves its worth, it will live in spite of the narrow circle which brought it into use, and in spite of its being superseded by a newer form. There is great difference between calling marmalade *swish* and calling stolen goods *swag*. The former is not necessary, it does not convey anything which *marmalade* does not. But *swag* has many advantages over *stolen goods*. It is shorter, and it means much more; it calls up a whole picture of midnight burgling, it suggests something which neither *booty*, *plunder*, *spoil* nor *prize* suggests. In addition to these

very real advantages, it is generally understood. But it is slang, it is still tainted with its origin. Whether the prejudice against it is a prejudice against the burglar and his ways, or whether it is a prejudice against stolen goods in anything but abstract terms, is of no matter; the prejudice is there, and must be reckoned with. Such is the capricious nature of language; it is one mass of similar prejudices, some of them social, some of them individual, but all of them entering into that vague something called style.

The objection to colloquialisms and vulgarisms stands on a somewhat different footing. Here there can be no question of unintelligibility, for colloquial words are of all words the ones most widely and most easily understood. The objection to them is that, outside a purely colloquial context, they tend to disturb the harmony of tone; they are not appropriate to the particular occasion. Why they should be inappropriate is not self-evident. It is probable that they offend our sense of fitness. We would none of us think of wearing evening dress in the morning, or of eating with our knives, or of doing a host of other things which it is not customary to do. To do so would offend our sense of fitness and would violate usage. So it is also with words. There are occasions on which the light and careless tone of conversation would be quite inappropriate, and there are occasions when the language of a dignified exhortation would be equally out of place. Dignity and ceremony, the world over, are associated with certain outward insignia which are only brought forth on special occasions. These are the times when we feel that we must get away from the ordinary humdrum,

existence and look upon something unusual, on something special to the occasion, on something which is not to be seen every day. Words also have their etiquette; some of them look strangely odd if they get out of their proper company. We have our workaday words and our ceremonious words, our ordinary and our special phraseology, the one class grading off imperceptibly into the other and each having its special function. Colloquialisms lie at the bottom of the scale. They consist of well-worn words and phrases which are convenient enough in everyday speech, but which may look a little shabby and out at elbows when they mingle with their superior brethren of the literary language.

"Philip played the devil with Edward's little game of subduing the Scots."

This sentence (quoted by Nesfield) from Mackinnon's *History of Scotland* shows two colloquialisms which are a little below the dignity of historical narrative. But here, again, if the writer wishes to write a history or anything else in a colloquial style, there is no reason why he should not do so; what he should not do is to be guilty of the incongruity which arises from a mixing of two very different styles.

Further violators of the purity of the literary vocabulary are foreign words. What is distasteful in them is that they smack of affectation; they are an advertisement of the superior culture of the writer who uses them, and are to this extent a conceit. Some of these words have become so completely acclimatised that they are no longer felt to be foreign words. Others are in the process of acclimatisation, and of these some have already got a good footing, whilst others are

unable to make the least progress towards favour. *Café, prestige, villa, piano, mosquito, meerschaum*, are words which are generally accepted in the language now. But they have been accepted only because there did not exist in the language any word which could do the work which they do. They were felt to be necessary and to be a definite addition to the resources of the language. Only on such conditions can a word be admitted. The use of foreign words which do not fulfil these conditions should therefore be resisted, for each one of them displaces a native word. *Penchant, cela va sans dire* can very well be dispensed with; for there are exact and more expressive equivalents in the native language.

Neologisms are also the subject of much contention before they take up a fixed place in a language. Some new words, however, are admitted without further parley, as, for example, the names given to their inventions by inventors. It is obvious that a language must year by year accept a number of new words, for new things are always being discovered or invented. These words are the record of the progress of civilisation in a country; the absence of them in any language would be proof that the people who spoke it were in decay. English has known many such words in recent years, among which may be mentioned: *Marconigram, cinematograph, radium*. But there are also new words formed by individual writers, who seek by means of them to give expression to some particular shade of thought. Many, again, are introduced with the desire to replace foreign words, as *foreword* for *preface*. These words, like any others, will be tested by their general convenience and appropriateness, and if they stand

the test they may live. But a writer uses them at his own risk; they may not be accepted, and the writer may become, to the extent that he uses them, unintelligible. Such words are *to enthuse* for *to make enthusiastic*, *perseverant* for *persevering*, *epoch-making* and *battle-famous*. Neologisms, like certain forms of slang, and like words used in a new meaning, may be the result of the laziness or carelessness of a writer who will not be at the trouble to find out the word which gives the exact expression to his thought; or they may be the result of a thorough and conscientious yet unsuccessful effort to find a word. It comes within the experience of all that words will not do just what we want them to do; neither recombinations nor figures of speech will avail, the words still remain an imperfect dress to the thought. It is then that the writer takes his liberties. The following passage from Professor Raleigh's book on *Style* is at once an admirable statement of this difficulty and a wonderful illustration of the effects which may be obtained by suggesting that which cannot itself be fully analysed:

"Fixity in the midst of change, fluctuation at the heart of sameness, such is the estate of language. According as they endeavour to reduce letters to some large haven and abiding place of civility, or prefer to throw in their lot with the centrifugal tendency and ride on the flying crest of change, are writers dubbed Classic or Romantic. The Romantics are individualist, anarchic; the strains of their passionate incantation raise no cities to confront the wilderness in guarded symmetry, but rather bring the stars shooting from their spheres, and draw wild things captive to a voice.



To them Society and Law seem dull phantoms, by the light cast from a flaming soul. They dwell apart and torture their lives in the effort to attain to self-expression. All means and modes offered them by language they seize on greedily, and shape them to this one end; they ransack the vocabulary of new sciences, and appropriate or invent strange jargons. They furbish up old words, or weld together new indifferently, that they may possess the machinery of their speech and not be possessed by it. They are at odds with the idiom of their country in that it serves the common need, and hunt it through all its metamorphoses to subject it to their private will. Heretics by profession, they are everywhere opposed to the party of the Classics who move by slower ways to ends less personal, but in no wise easier of attainment."

In using archaisms one limits, or chooses—whichever way one looks at the matter—one's audience. An archaism is a word which has either gone out of use, or a word the original sense of which has gone out of use, though the word itself remains in the language with a changed meaning. *Leech* for *doctor* has practically disappeared from the language; *inform*, though it is still in everyday use, has lost—or is losing—some of its earlier meaning.

The use of archaic words either makes prose unintelligible or else it limits the circle of readers to those who have some knowledge of etymology or semantics. The use of those words which are archaic in the sense that they have disappeared from the language entirely is to be discouraged on the general ground that they have in all probability no advantage over the word

which has replaced them. In such cases there is always the modern word, which is certainly the more familiar to the reader, and is probably clearer in meaning. But these archaic words are often used in poetry, and sometimes in prose, to give an old-time effect: historical novels abound in them. In the same way foreign words are sometimes used to give local colour. But in both cases excessive use of this means is apt to give the impression of affectation.

Those words, on the other hand, which are only archaic in sense, and not in form, may often be used with great effect. They have their roots struck deep in the past and at the same time they have a collateral hold on the present. They have, in the course of centuries, gathered accretions of meaning which make them unusually mellow and rich in content. In the hands of those who know how to make use of them they may be turned to account where other words would fail, for it may well happen that the blending of the old and the new meaning may yield precisely the result which the writer seeks—a result not otherwise obtainable except by a lengthy paraphrase or by the use of some figure of speech.

The departures from the normal usage which have already been discussed are all departures from the standard usage. The only standard which can possibly be accepted by the moderns is, of course, the usage of their own day. We cannot admit a word or a phrase or a construction simply because it was used by Shakespeare or Milton or Scott. If we did we should not know where to stop; we should be obliged to admit the constructions of Chaucer, since he too is a classic,

or even of *Beowulf*. By the standard of modern usage is generally meant the usage of reputable writers of the present day; not the standard of any particular writer, but the standard of the generality of writers. Within the limits of this standard, words should be used correctly, with precision, and appropriately. They are used correctly when they express the thought which the writer wishes to express, and when the word is used in its normal, accepted sense. Irony is not the same thing as sarcasm, and comprehensive is not the same thing as comprehensible, so the writer who uses one when he means the other is using words incorrectly. He both leads the reader on a false scent and also fails to give proper expression to his thought. Precision in the use of words consists in giving the exact, and not the approximate meaning. If we wish to say that Shakespeare was a great dramatist, we are not precise if we say that he was a great man, or even that he was a great poet. Precision thus consists in choosing the word which exactly conveys the meaning. Very often it is achieved simply by substituting a specific for a general term, or by substituting a general for a specific term. Appropriateness in the use of words consists in the use of words which best suit the occasion. This quality of words has already been discussed, but it may well be further illustrated here by the following sentence of Mr. Micawber, in which the words used are obviously not suited to the tone of ordinary conversation :

“ My dear Copperfield, this is indeed a meeting which is calculated to impress the mind with a sense of the unstability and uncertainty of all human—in short, it is a most extraordinary meeting.”

Under the head of appropriateness should also be included the use of technical terms and provincialisms. Of these the former are clearly inappropriate anywhere except in writing of a technical character, unless they are duly explained when they are first introduced. Provincialisms, like colloquialisms, though not suited to writing of a general nature, may be quite appropriate in special settings, more particularly in dialogue.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MISCELLANEOUS ERRORS OF CONSTRUCTION

#### Nouns

Where two nouns joined by *and* are in the possessive case, the 's is added to both to indicate separate possession, and to the second only to indicate joint possession :

“Dickson and Brown’s warehouse.”

“Dickson’s and Brown’s warehouses.”

The 's is, as a rule, only added to the names of living beings and of a few personified things, such as *fortune*, *sun*, *moon*, *ship*, etc. “The garden’s walls,” “The house’s roof,” are better written, “The walls of the garden,” “The roof of the house.”

The 's should not be used in the objective genitive—that is to say, when the thing is represented as the object of the action: “The king’s death” = “The death of the king.”

The 's is only added to those nouns in which it is pronounced in speaking :

“Jamel’s book” “Epps’s cocoa.” “Ross’s ginger ale.”

In using feminine nouns where a masculine is possible, it should be borne in mind that there is often a difference

in meaning between the two. The sentences, "She is the best actress of her day," "She is the best actor of her day," differ in that the first compares her only with women actors, and the second implies that she is better than the men actors also.

Care should be exercised in the use of foreign feminines, especially of those ending in *ée*. The corresponding masculine form is *é*. "He dismissed one of his employés, Mr. B.," is wrong.

The nouns *sort* and *kind* are singular. "These, those sort" is therefore wrong.

### Adjectives and Articles

Repeat the article before the second of two nouns joined by *and* when they are to be understood separately: "The views of a husband and a father are not always the same" The sense is here still better brought out by repeating the preposition of also.

*Few* and *little* are negative in force; *a few* and *a little* are positive. "Few people attended, and they were disappointed," should be *a few*.

*Either* means *one of two*; *any* means *one of more than two*. The sentence, "There are three candidates on the list, either of whom will suit our purpose," should read, *any of whom*.

*Every* is used only for more than two, *each* for two or more than two. *Each and every* means not only that each is referred to, but also all.

*Each other* refers to two, *one another* to more than two, though the distinction is not always observed, even by good writers.

**Comparison**

When two things are compared, it is better to use the comparative than the superlative. The superlative, however, is very often used, especially in colloquial language: "He is the better of the two," "He is the best of the two."

Avoid using *than* in comparisons after comparatives ending in *-or*: "All things considered, the rolling stock on the private lines is superior in comfort *than* that of the state lines." The correct form is *superior to*.

After a comparative the word *other* must be used before the second object compared. If this is not done, a wrong meaning may be conveyed: "Mr. C. has done more for this movement than any living man." This implies that Mr. C. is dead. If Mr. C. is alive, this must be clearly shown by including him in the class of living men by prefixing *other*: "Mr. C. has done more for this movement than any other living man." *Other* should not be used, however, with the superlative.

The superlative should be followed by a plural noun, which should not be qualified by *any*: "He has done the best work of any student this year." This sentence should read, "He has done the best work of all the students this year," or, "He has done better work than any other student this year."

Adjectives denoting qualities which are incapable of degree should not be used in the comparative or superlative. Such are *unique*, *principal*, *chief*, *unanimous*, *universal*, and many more.

In the form of comparison, *the more (the less)* *the more (the less)* etc., no other construction should be allowed to replace the second *the more (the less)* etc.,

as, for example, in the sentence: "The more I see of him, I like him less."

Do not confuse the two constructions *more and more* and *more than ever*, as in the sentence: "People came to like him more and more than ever."

## Pronouns

Do not make a fresh start in the middle of a sentence by introducing a pronoun in the same syntactical relation as the noun for which it stands: "The applicant, being a householder, he is entitled to a vote." *He* should be cancelled.

A reflexive pronoun should not be made the subject of a sentence: "Williams and myself were in the same plight." Substitute *I* for *myself*.

Pronouns of the third person plural should not be used as antecedents to *who* and *that*; *those* is to be preferred: "They that are whole have no need of a physician."

When the antecedent is *same*, the consequent should be *as* or *that*; when the antecedent is *such*, the consequent should be *as*: "That is the same man as we saw yesterday." "The consequences are just such as were to be expected."

When the indefinite pronoun *one* is used, it should be borne in mind that the corresponding possessive case is *one's*, and not *his*, *her*, or *their*: "One should be sure of his facts."

The indefinite pronoun is *whatever*, and not, *what ever*. The latter is more of an exclamatory interrogative: "Whatever happens, I shall come." "What ever is the matter?"



*Case after a Comparative.*—In comparisons after *as* and *than*, the pronoun may be in the nominative or objective case, according to the meaning. The simplest way to determine the right case is to fill out the elliptical clause following the conjunction. “He is to blame as much as me” (am to blame) is evidently wrong. “He likes you as much as me=as he likes me.” “He likes you as much as I (like you).”

The construction *than whom*, although long objected to, seems now to be accepted: “Mr. S., than whom no man has a better knowledge of the conditions.”

The case of the pronoun following the verb *to be* should be the same as the case which precedes it. The only exception is in the generally accepted idiom, “It is me.” In the other persons this construction is not permissible; we must write, “It is he,” “It is they,” and not, “It is him,” “It is them.”

An error of a similar kind is to be found in the expression “Between you and I.” Here the pronoun is governed by the preposition *between*, and must therefore be in the objective case: “Between you and me.”

By separating the governing preposition from its pronoun, the expression “Who is it for?” has crept into the spoken language, though it is not yet so common in writing. The correct form is “Whom is it for?”

### *Relative Pronouns*

Of the three relative pronouns, *who* is masculine and feminine, *that* is of all genders, and *which* is only neuter, though it was formerly also masculine and feminine, as in, “Our Father which art in Heaven.”

*Whose*, being only masculine or feminine, should not be used of inanimate things, except of those already specially mentioned as taking 's, such as the *sun* and *moon*, etc. *Whose* is also used of the nobler animals; but if it is so used, care should be taken not to pass from the use of the masculine or feminine pronoun to the neuter: "The horse whose owner we met broke its leg during the race." It is usually better to use the neuter pronoun, of *which*.

The relative *who* is sometimes wrongly written *whom*, by attraction to the nearest verb, as, for example, in the sentence, "Whom do you think he is?" Here the pronoun is complement to the verb *is*. "Who is he, do you think?" is the sense, and therefore the pronoun should be in the nominative. The mistake arises, of course, from regarding *whom* as the object of *think*. Similarly in the sentence, "Whom did you say had arrived?" *whom* is subject to *arrived*—i.e. "Who had arrived, did you say?" It should therefore be *who*.

A noun or a pronoun in the possessive case should not be made the antecedent to a relative pronoun, as in the following sentence: "Do you forget his enthusiasm who brought this movement so far." The construction should be changed to "the enthusiasm of him who."

Grammarians frequently make distinctions between the use of *who*, *which* and *that* as relatives. These distinctions are not, however, as far as one can see, always observed. They are based on the distinction of restrictive, or defining relative clauses and non-restrictive, non-defining, or parenthetical relative clauses.

The difference between a restrictive relative clause and a parenthetical one is that the former limits the meaning and application of the word which it modifies, whereas the latter does not. The parenthetical relative clause, far from restricting the sense of the governing word, might be omitted entirely without altering the sense of what remains. If the restrictive clause were omitted, however, the sense would be incomplete. Examples will best show the nature of the two kinds :

“The man that cleans our windows has just died.”

“The influence of Fielding, who lived in the eighteenth century, has been considerable.”

If the relative clause were omitted from the first of these sentences the sense would be incomplete ; we should not know which man had died. If the relative clause were omitted from the second sentence, on the other hand, the meaning would still be perfectly clear, since what is said in the relative clause is something additional to what is said in the main clause, not qualifying it in any way or changing its meaning ever so little.

This distinction is of some importance, not only because it may govern the use of the relative pronouns, but also, as will appear later on, because it underlies the rules governing the co-ordination of clauses.

The general rule is that *that* is the relative that introduces a restrictive clause, and *who*, or *which* a continuative or parenthetical clause. But we often find, in the best authors, that *who* or *which* is used in restrictive clauses. *That*, on the other hand, is never found in continuative clauses ; we cannot say, for example, “Fielding, that lived in the eighteenth

century," etc., though we can say, "The man who cleans our windows," etc.

*That* is also generally used after the pronoun *it* and after the name of a person, also after a superlative or the equivalent of a superlative: "It was they that did it." "It is the best that I have seen for a long time."

*Omission of the Relative Pronoun.*—Usage appears to permit the omission of the relative pronoun when it stands in the objective relation, provided that clearness is not sacrificed by doing so: "The gallery we saw yesterday was burnt to the ground." But the relative should not be omitted when it is the subject of the clause: "He has an impudence would carry him through anything." Here the relative *that* should be inserted before *would*. Again, a relative which is the object of a non-restrictive clause should not be omitted.

A personal pronoun should not be allowed to take the place of a relative pronoun in a co-ordinate relative clause: "They now drew near the city which they had been ordered to attack the preceding winter, but they had never seen it." The last clause should read, "but which they had never seen."

A relative pronoun should not stand in different grammatical relations to two verbs: "What I told you, and actually occurred," etc., in which sentence the first *what* is the object of the verb *told*, and the second (omitted) is subject to the verb *occurred*.

Some grammarians object to the omission of *in which* after *manner* and *way*. The omission is certainly rare after *manner*, but it is quite common, especially in the spoken language, after *way*: "Observe carefully the

way he does it." It is less common, even in the spoken language, when *way* is modified: "We noticed the careful way in which he did it."

It is desirable, for the sake of euphony, even if not for other reasons, to avoid a succession of *who's* in the same sentence: "It is not known *who* the people are who committed the crime." This defect can generally be rectified by substituting *that* or *which* for *who*: "It is not yet known *who* the people are that committed the crime."

Grammarians have condemned the use of the construction *and who*, *and which*, unless the preceding clause is also a relative clause. The construction is nevertheless quite common, though only when both clauses, or the relative clause and the antecedent phrase are both of the same nature, *i.e.* both restrictive or both non-restrictive: "He was a man of very great courage; and who had often proved his quality in the hour of danger."

A relative clause and a relative phrase should not be co-ordinated unless both are either restrictive or non-restrictive: "Exactly how many Old English terminations *-ing* is heir to is a question debated by historical grammarians, which we are not competent to answer."

In a co-ordinate sentence do not change the construction from a relative to a personal pronoun: "These are the samples which you may either choose or return them."

Do not co-ordinate a restrictive and a non-restrictive clause: "He replied in the best manner which he could, and which was indeed not very good."

In using a demonstrative to save the repetition of a word or words, care should be taken that it is used correctly: "Another mode of adding to one's income is that of poultry-farming." Poultry-farming is not a mode.

A pronoun should not refer to a syntactically dependent noun: "After removing the boiler from the locomotive they took it into the shed to fix a new one." Here *it* seems to refer to *locomotive*, and such is indeed the sense. Grammatically, however, it refers to the head noun *boiler*.

Avoid the use of *same* as a substitute for the personal pronoun: "When you have examined these patterns, please return same to me."

## Verbs

### Concord

The general rule is that the verb must agree in number and person with its subject. The rule is most commonly broken by the influence of attraction—i.e. where the real subject is far removed from the verb, and the latter agrees with some nearer noun: "The old order of things have changed." The verb is attracted into the number of the nearer noun *things*, instead of agreeing with the real subject, *order*.

The commonest exceptions to the rule are:

1. Two singular subjects may take a singular verb if both are really the same thing: "His friend and benefactor is dead." Here *friend* and *benefactor* are the same person, and this fact is shown by the singular verb. If two persons are meant, then the sentence should read: "His friend and benefactor are dead,"

or better still, "His friend and his benefactor are dead." Other examples are :

"Bread and butter is nourishing food."

"The aim and purpose of the institution is to provide suitable accommodation," etc.

2. A singular subject may be followed by a plural verb when the subject is modified by two adjectives denoting different objects : "Mental and moral science are not the same thing," though it is better here to repeat the word *science*.

A collective noun or a noun of multitude may be used with a plural verb when the units or separate members of the group are thought of : "The jury are disagreed." "People are unwilling."

There are also a certain number of singular nouns which may be followed by a plural verb, such as *number*, *plenty*, when these have a plural sense, and especially when they are followed by a plural noun : "A number of my friends were present at the ceremony."

It should be noted that, if the two adjectives modifying a singular noun do not refer to two distinct things, the verb should be in the singular : "The black and white house is common in Cheshire."

3. In a few cases a plural noun is used with a singular verb. Certain words with a plural form but singular meaning, such as *means*, *news*, *mathematics*, *politics*, etc., take a singular verb : "The news is serious." "Politics is a game."

So also the titles of books, when in the plural, take a singular verb : "*The Mountain Lovers*, by Fiona Macleod, has just been published." "*Many Inventions* is an interesting book."

Singular subjects joined by *and not, as well as*, take a singular verb: "His brother, and not his cousin, was killed." "His brother as well as his cousin was killed."

Subjects joined by *with* take a singular or a plural verb, according to the meaning. If whatever follows *with* is only a part of the thing to which it is joined, then the verb should be in the singular: "The house with its furniture is to be sold at noon." "The basket with its contents was thrown out of the window." But if *with* joins a separate and independent subject, the verb should be in the plural: "The father with his son and daughter were killed in the recent accident"; though here it would be better to write *and* instead of *with*.

Two singular subjects connected by *either . . . or, neither . . . nor*, take a singular verb. If the two subjects are of different number or person, it is best to make the verb agree with the nearest: "Neither flattery nor threat was of any avail." But:

"Neither flattery nor threats were of any avail."

"Either you or I am wrong."

"Either I or you are wrong."

"Either he or I am wrong."

"Either I or he is wrong."

In the same way *either* and *neither*, when used as distributives, are used with a singular verb: "Neither of them helps his parents" (not *help*).

*Each, no one, nobody, anybody, every one, everybody, every, many a, all*, require a singular verb; *none* requires a plural verb:

"Many a man has suffered through ignorance of the law."



"Everybody is his friend, and he is the friend of everybody."

"Anybody can tell you the way."

"None of them are of any use."

The singular is, however, also used with *none*, especially when the sense particularly requires it: "None supports him as much as he does."

The subject of the sentence should not be left without a verb: "He who has suffered most in the cause, let him speak." Here *he* is left without a verb. Either cancel *he* and substitute *let him*, or cancel *let him* and substitute *should*.

Care should be taken, when the subject of a sentence is a relative pronoun, to see that the verb agrees in number with the antecedent of that pronoun and not with any other word: "This is one of the best proposals that have ever been made." The antecedent of *that* is *proposals*, and not *one*: hence the verb should be in the plural, and not in the singular.

### *Auxiliaries and Tense*

If in a compound sentence a single verb does duty for two subjects, care should be taken that the form of the verb is such as to permit of it: "The chairman was of opinion that the facts were wrong and the inference drawn were right." This is equivalent to saying that "the inference drawn were right." Write, "that the inference drawn from them was right."

When, to save repetition, two auxiliaries are used with one principal verb, care should be taken that the form of the principal verb is appropriate to the two

auxiliaries, and not merely to one of them : " He never has, and never will, take such strong measures." *He never has take* is impossible. The correct participle, *taken*, should be inserted after *has*.

In the same way, if there is only one auxiliary to two principal verbs, it should be such that it may be correctly associated with both : " Since that date ten members have been appointed and ten resigned." *Have been resigned* is not possible. Insert *have* between *ten* and *resigned*.

The present tense may be used with a future sense where the context makes it quite clear that the future is meant : " When does he arrive ? "

This use of the present tense for the future is also quite common, in the spoken language, when there is no word in the context which necessarily points to the future, as, for example, " I hope he comes," in which *hope* need not imply futurity. We may hope that things happened in the past also. This construction, though common enough in the spoken language, is scarcely to be commended in the written language.

### *Split Infinitive*

The split infinitive—that is to say, the placing of a word or words between *to* and the verb—is generally condemned by grammarians, though it can scarcely be said that their condemnation has been of much avail. The practice of splitting the infinitive grows more common every day, especially in journalism. It is perhaps better to avoid the practice, on the simple ground that it is ugly, and checks the movement of a

sentence: "I wish you to clearly understand." "He wishes to finally settle the matter."

### *Shall, Should, Will, Would*

A good deal of confusion is common in the use of these forms, a confusion which is largely due to losing sight of the primary meanings of the words when used in the simple future and conditional tenses. It should be remembered that the simple future—*i.e.* the expression of futurity without the addition of any further element of meaning—is expressed by :

I shall come	we shall come
thou wilt come	you will come
he will come	they will come

and similarly, with the necessary changes of *should* and *would*, in the conditional. Any departure from this use of the words *shall* and *will*, *should* and *would*, brings with it a change of meaning of one sort or another. If *will* or *would* is used in the first person, then these words mean something more than mere futurity; they imply that the speaker is *willing* to do the thing mentioned, or that he *intends* to do it. Similarly, if *shall* or *should* is used in the second or third person, then the use of these words implies, in addition to futurity, something of *determination*, *command*, *assurance*, or some other feeling of the speaker.

If the verb is preceded by *if*, then what would normally be *would* in the second and third persons becomes *should* :

if I should  
if you should  
if they should

The verb in the consequent clause, however, follows the ordinary rule: "If you should see him, you would know him." *You should know him* in the consequent clause would mean, *you ought to know him*.

*Should* is also used in all three persons when it follows *lest*, or where it has the meaning *ought*. *Would* is also used in all three persons where it has the meaning of *habit*: "He would get up regularly every morning at six."

### *Passive*

The somewhat clumsy passive constructions, "It was managed to raise a large sum of money," "A large sum of money was managed to be raised," should be avoided if possible, since they are not easy to understand.

### *Participles*

A present participle should never be used unless it refers to the subject of the sentence: "Returning home the other night the moon went behind a cloud." Was the moon returning home, or the speaker? The sentence may be recast: "Returning home the other night, I saw the moon go behind a cloud."

The only exceptions to this rule are those participles which have become prepositions and conjunctions, such as *considering*, *regarding*, and some others: "Considering the weather, they would be well advised to stay behind."

A present participle should not be used to express an action which is not contemporaneous with the action of the principal verb: "He sailed for New York on Monday, arriving there on Saturday." The sentence should be, *and arrived there on Saturday*.

Sometimes the subject to the participle is expressed indirectly by means of a possessive pronoun: "Having finished the first part of the work, my intention now is to take a holiday." Here *my* is felt to contain *I*. It would have been just as easy in this case, as in most others of this kind, to use the true subject, and write, "I intend to take a holiday."

There is a tendency to regard a participial phrase as performing the function of a clause of reason. In such a sentence as, "Having done this much, he felt obliged to do more," it is questionable whether this practice should be encouraged, as it involves a confusion of functions.

### *Gerund*

As in the case of the participle, so also in the case of the gerund, the subject should always be present in the sentence: "In learning to ride a bicycle, the machine should always be kept moving at a good pace." It is not the machine which learns. Recast: "One should always keep the machine moving," etc.

The noun governing a gerund should be put in the possessive case, with 's, if it is of such a kind as to take that inflection, and if it is not too far removed from the gerund. A pronoun should also be put in the possessive case: "He went out without her knowing it."

### *Miscellaneous*

The passive construction should not be used when the agent of the action is left vaguely indicated: "That was a time of difficulty for me, which will never be forgotten." The sentence would be much clearer if

the passive construction were changed to the active, *which I shall never forget.*

Care should be taken with the construction of many verbs which must be followed by a preposition. For example, *to regard* may be constructed with a direct object, "They regarded him intently," or it may be constructed with *as*, which should not be omitted. "His work was rightly regarded of great value" should be *as of great value*. So also we may say, "I prefer this to that," or, "I prefer to do this rather than that," but not, "I prefer this than that." Sometimes, too, the infinitive is wrongly used with certain adjectives: "No such difficulties are probable to arise."

### Adverbs

Negative adverbs should not be used with words already containing an element of negation: "No one scarcely believes in ghosts nowadays," for *scarcely any one believes*.

*That* should not be used instead of *so* as an adverb: "He was that tired that he could scarcely crawl upstairs to bed."

Ambiguity may arise from the mismanagement of a negative clause: "They did not go because we were there." Does this mean that the fact of our being there prevented them from going, or does it mean that our being there was not the reason for their going? In the former case the sentence should read: "Because we were there, they did not go." If the latter meaning is intended, the sentence should read: "It was not because we were there that they went."

### Prepositions

Generally speaking, a preposition should not occupy the last place in the sentence, unless it forms an integral part of the verb and is immediately preceded by it. "He dislikes being talked about" is correct, because the verb *to talk about* means something quite different from the verb *to talk*. But the sentence, "In making this statement he evidently did not foresee the charges he was laying himself open to," would be better written, *to which he was laying himself open*.

*Beside* means *by the side of*, or even *outside*; *besides* means *in addition to*:

"The post-office is beside the town-hall."

"That is beside the question."

"He has a motor-car and a bicycle besides."

*In* points to the end of a period of time, *within* points to a time before the end of the period:

"I shall return in a week" = "when a week has elapsed."

"I shall return within a week" = "before the week is out."

*Between* is used of two objects, *among* of more than two:

"He was sitting between the window and the door."

"He vanished among the crowd."

Frequently the wrong preposition is used with nouns, adjectives, and verbs. The only way to correct errors of this kind is to note carefully the usage of good writers.

Below is a list of some of the words with which mistakes are most often made :

abound in	disqualified for (with noun)
accord with	from (with verb)
account for	discourage from
adapt to	encourage to
admit (into), of	entrust with a thing, to
adverse to	endowed with
affectionate to (wards)	envious of
agree with (somebody)	glad of
to (something)	hatred of, for
aim at	hateful to
alternate with	impatient of
analogy with, to, of	independent of
aspire to, after	insight into
authority to, on, over	intent on
avert from	intrude on, into
averse to, from	negligent in
communicate with, to	neglectful of
compare with, to (metaphorically)	oblivious of
concur with (person)	originate in (a thing)
in (thing)	with (a person)
confide to, in	preferable to
confident of	replete with
consequent upon	rich in
contemporary with	sensible of
a contemporary of	sensitive to
dependent on	sorry for, about
differ from	superior to
different from (to)	tamper with
diffident of	tinker at

### Conjunctions

*Scarcely* should be followed by *when*, and not by *than* :  
 "Scarcely had the royal carriage passed this spot when a bomb was thrown from among the crowd."

*No sooner* is followed by *than* and not by *but* : "No sooner had he returned than he was off again."

*Without* should not be used as a conjunction instead of *unless* : "He never does his work without he is forced to."



*Like* should not be used as a conjunction instead of *as*: "He speaks like his father does." "He speaks like his father" is quite correct, but *like* is then a preposition and not a conjunction.

Care should be taken, when using correlative conjunctions, such as *neither . . . nor*, *not only . . . but also*, that they are followed by the same parts of speech: "He not only lost his ticket, but also his luggage." This sentence should read, "He lost not only," etc.

## CHAPTER IX

### PUNCTUATION

PUNCTUATION is essentially a guide to meaning, and should always be regulated by it. In a certain sense it does for sentences and phrases what indentation does for paragraphs: it marks the direction, and shows what words are to be taken together as units, and what words are to be understood as being a mere continuation of preceding words. Just as the paragraph marks a longer break or pause in a spoken discourse, so also a punctuation mark shows a shorter pause in the sentence. But there is one great difference between the spoken language and the written language. In the former the words come one by one, and if the relation between them is not clearly marked by accent, tone, rhythm, of which last punctuation is a part, the meaning is not clear. In the latter, in the written language, the reader can and does see further ahead; he reads a whole group of words at once, and therefore assimilates them more rapidly. It has been suggested in this connection that the reason why punctuation was fuller a hundred or two hundred years ago is that books were more read aloud then than now, and doubtless the further we go back the more this is true. Punctuation, then, is a

substitute for tone and pauses of speech—a defective substitute, it may be, but still the best at our disposal. In the sentence, “Little children love one another,” a comma placed after children will completely change the sense. It does so, however, not only because it marks a slight pause between *children* and *love*, but also because it stands for the whole difference of tone and sentence stress. Similarly between the following sentences, quoted by the authors of *The King’s English*—“The master beat the scholar with a strap,” “The master beat the scholar, with a strap”—the difference of meaning is considerable. It does not, perhaps, necessarily lie in the implication in the latter sentence that a strap is an instrument of barbarism when used for this purpose, though there certainly is an element of superadded meaning, which may or may not be of an emotional character.

Generally, however, the function of punctuation is to point out the grammatical and logical relation of the elements of a sentence, to hold the words together in groups corresponding to certain thoughts, and thus to assist the eye, in rapidly passing over the printed page, to take in at a glance those words which together constitute a thought. This is the basis on which most rules of punctuation are formulated, for the punctuation which seeks to bring out the subtler emotional shades of meaning can clearly not be reduced to rule, but must depend entirely on the purpose of the writer; it is both too fluctuating and too sensitive to be confined within the narrow limits of any classification. Even the rules of punctuation based on grammar and logic are not uniform; frequently there are alternative

possibilities of punctuation, neither of which has any real advantage over the other.

The moderns, indeed, are much more sparing with their points than earlier writers were, and there would appear to be good reason for this. For, after all, if punctuation is only an artificial device to show where the pauses are made in speech, it would seem that if those pauses are sufficiently clear without punctuation, then punctuation might be dispensed with. There certainly are, however, a very large number of cases in which modern usage requires some sort of stop, but yet in which there can be no manner of doubt where the pause should be, and in which the relation of the parts of the sentence is perfectly obvious. In the following sentence, from the same source as the last one, some of the commas might very well be removed without any risk of rendering the meaning or the relation of the parts unclear :

“It is, however, already plain enough that, unless, indeed, some great catastrophe should upset all their calculations, the authorities have very little intention . . .” (*Times*).

Most people, it is true, do not go to the permissible extreme in economising stops, doubtless because here, as elsewhere, custom and tradition are so powerful. The rules given below do not, therefore, make any pretence to completeness. They include only those which deal with the punctuation necessary to make clear the meaning, and the relation of the various parts of the sentence. They are precepts rather than rules, based on the general practice of accredited writers ; they are not at all invariable, for there is, as there should be, considerable latitude possible in the use of points.

Perhaps the best practical advice to the novice is to punctuate on the model of the spoken language, not to punctuate unless it is necessary to avoid ambiguity or obscurity, and, on the other hand, not to under-punctuate. Over-punctuation checks the flow of language, pulls up the reader more than necessary, and irritates him in proportion. There is nothing so irritating as to be tripped up every few steps by a comma. Under-punctuation is perhaps a worse fault than over-punctuation, for it brings in its train obscurity and ambiguity.

Punctuation is, broadly speaking, of two kinds: there is punctuation which indicates the relation of groups of words, and there is the punctuation which points out the function of single words or parts of words. The commonest stops of the former kind are the comma, the semi-colon, the colon, the full-stop or point, the question mark, the inverted comma, the dash, and the parenthesis. The chief representative of the latter group is the apostrophe; it may also be held to include the hyphen and underlining.

### Separation of the Larger Units

1. The end of a complete and independent statement should be marked either by a full-stop or a semi-colon:

"We are often able in fact to trace particular phrases or idioms to individuals; we know the history of their rise."

This sentence has two distinct elements, each of which is complete, since it could stand by itself, and each of which is independent for the same reason. They are separated, therefore, by a semi-colon, and the close

of the second element is marked by a period, or full-stop. A full-stop might also have been used after *individuals*, and would have been equally correct. Whether a semi-colon or a full-stop is to be used depends entirely upon the personal preferences of the writer of the sentence; if he prefers two short simple sentences he will use the full stop, but if he prefers a single compound sentence he will use the semi-colon. Probably, as a matter of fact, he will use the full-stop at one moment and the semi-colon at another, according as he wishes to vary the length of his sentences, and according as he considers the two parts of the sentences more or less closely associated.

Sometimes a colon is used under these conditions, especially when one of the independent statements formally introduces another :

“I refuse it for this reason: you have not deserved it.”

It is not sufficient to use a comma in such cases, as in the sentence :

“It does not matter what they say, they do it all the same.”

Needless to say, if the independent statement is in the form of a question, the proper stop is a question mark.

Sometimes the complete statement is elliptical, and may consist of a single word. Even in this case one of the stops mentioned, usually the full-stop, should be used :

“We made all possible haste. Too late. The train had gone.”

“Will you do me this favour? With pleasure. I am glad to be of use.”

2. Between co-ordinate clauses joined by one of the co-ordinating conjunctions *and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, *either*, *neither*, put a comma or a semi-colon: "The whistle blew, and the train started."

Whether a semi-colon is used or a comma again depends on the degree of detachment which the writer wishes to give to the two statements. The semi-colon introduces a longer pause, separates one statement from the other more markedly, and for this reason gives it greater emphasis. Generally speaking, the comma is used when the sentence, or clause which follows it is short, and the semi-colon is used when it is long, or when it already contains interior commas. Sometimes such co-ordinate clauses are separated by the full-stop, which gives even greater emphasis:

"Thus metaphysics, ethics, law, political economy, chemistry, theology, cease to be literature in the same degree as they are capable of a severe scientific treatment. And hence it is that Aristotle's works on the one hand, though at first sight literature, approach in character, at least a great number of them, to mere science."

The use of the full-stop here makes the statement following it an independent statement standing out distinctly from the preceding one. A comma or a semi-colon in the same sentence would have joined rather than separated the two parts. In deciding which stop has to be used, the writer must be guided by the effect which he wishes to create. Too many commas in such co-ordinate clauses give a sentence a disjointed and stringy effect. Thus, for example, the sentence above quoted continues:

“For even though the things which he treats of and exhibits may not always be real and true, yet he treats them as if they were, not as if they were the thoughts of his own mind; that is, he treats them scientifically.”

And if the three statements were run into one and separated only by commas, the whole sentence would have a stringy effect.

“Thus metaphysics, law, political economy, chemistry, theology, cease to be literature in the same degree as they are capable of a severe scientific treatment, and hence it is that Aristotle’s works, on the one hand, though at first sight literature, approach in character, at least in a great number of them, to mere science, for even though the things which he treats of and exhibits may not always be real and true, yet he treats them as if they were, not as if they were the thoughts of his own mind, that is, he treats them scientifically.”

• Especially should care be taken in the punctuating of sentences consisting of three members to see that the grouping of them is logical. In the sentence:

“Some people prefer to have them made by hand instead of by machine. They assert that when made by hand, they last better, but this process is much more expensive than the machine process, and the gain in quality is more than outweighed by the loss of money.”

• The thoughts here are not logically grouped; for the main thoughts are that some people have certain views, and that there are certain drawbacks to these views. In order to bring this out the sentence should read:

“Some people prefer to have them made by hand instead of by machine; they assert that when made



by hand they last better. But this process is much more expensive than the machine process; and the gain in quality is more than outweighed by the loss of money."

3. Direct questions—that is, questions in which the actual words of the question are used, should be followed by a question mark:

"When do you intend to return?"

"He said, 'When do you intend to return?'"

But indirect questions—that is, questions in which the actual words of the original question are not used, do not require the question mark:

"He asked me when I intended to return."

4. Independent statements which are exclamations should be followed by the exclamation mark:

"What a fire!"

"What a splendid fellow he was!"

All the rules given above refer, with the exception of rule 2, to independent sentences, to sentences which might stand by themselves, either wholly or in their component parts, and in all the cases, except again in rule 2, the stops used are the colon, semi-colon, full-stop, question mark or exclamation mark. The comma does not occur. It is to be concluded, therefore, that the comma is a stop which is only to be used in separating those parts of the sentence which are dependent, which cannot stand alone. This is the main distinction of the comma as compared with other stops; namely, that it can only be used in the interior of a sentence, whereas the other stops are mainly used to close a complete sentence or any part of a sentence which

is complete in meaning. The next following rules deal only with interior punctuation.

5. The general rule for interior punctuation is that all consecutive elements of a sentence which might be read together erroneously, or which might bear a wrong interpretation if so read, should be separated by a stop—usually a comma :

“ While the workmen were eating an elephant escaped from a travelling circus appeared on the scene.”

The sentence is ludicrous as it stands, and the ludicrousness arises from the fact that the words *eating* and *elephant* are read together. The sentence should read :

“ While the workmen were eating, an elephant, escaped from a travelling circus, appeared on the scene.”

Similarly, “ When the doctor had left the invalid sitting up on the sofa refused to see him again,” should be punctuated : “ When the doctor had left, the invalid, sitting up on the sofa, refused to see him again.”

6. When two elements of a simple sentence are separated by intervening words in such a way that the relation between those elements is not immediately clear, the intervening words should be rounded with commas. Less often dashes or parentheses are used for this purpose :

“ He was like all the family a thorough-going conservative.”

• Here *like all the family* should be separated by commas from the main statement :

“ He was, like all the family, a thorough-going conservative.”

It should be remembered, too, that the comma should

be placed both before and after the parenthetical words.

- 7. If the intervening words themselves contain further parenthetical words, then it is better to place the whole between dashes rather than between commas :

“He wrote me a letter with the intention—as he informed Harrison, my secretary—of bringing the matter before me.”

Parentheses may also be used in these cases, but it should be remembered that it is not necessary to use commas as well, unless the sentence itself, omitting the parentheses, requires them.

“If he had written the letter,—as he informed Harrison, my secretary, that he did,—the matter would have been quite clear.”

8. Where a number of adjectives, not joined by a conjunction, modify the same noun, they are separated from one another, though not from the noun, by commas :

“A vast, unbroken chain of mountains.”

“A pale, sickly, emaciated-looking person.”

But if the last of the adjectives is intimately bound up in sense with the noun, or forms a kind of compound with it, no comma is necessary :

“A pretty little girl.”

“A bright young man.”

“A dear old man.”

9. Similarly, adverbs or other parts of speech, or even clauses, should be separated by commas :

“He insisted gently, firmly, but kindly.”

“When you have finished, when you have done what is expected of you, you will be free to do as you please.”

But if the co-ordinate clauses themselves contain commas, it is better to separate them by semi-colons :

“When, at the end of the day, you have finished; when you have done all that is required of you, you will be free to do as you please.”

The semi-colon is not used when the co-ordinate clauses, words, or phrases are short.

10. Adjectives, adjectival phrases, participles, and participial phrases placed at the head of a sentence should be separated by commas :

“Tired of waiting, he went away.”

“Timid by nature, he avoided his fellow-men.”

“Weary of the delay, he set out to discover the reason himself.”

11. When they follow their governing noun, all adjectives, adjectival phrases, or clauses, participles should be separated by commas, if they are non-restrictive—that is to say, if they can be omitted without destroying the sense of the sentence :

“The Maories, who live in New Zealand, are an industrious and intelligent race.”

“At last he rose, overcome by his feelings, to reply to the toast.”

“The prisoner, defiant to the end, was hurried from the dock.”

Compare with these the restrictive clauses in the following sentences :

“The Germans who settle in England show themselves admirable citizens.”

“The gentleman sitting in the box is my uncle.”

“Men ready to act are what we want.”

12. Adverbs are not usually separated by a stop from their verb :

“Gently and gracefully the machine came to earth.”

13. An adverbial phrase placed at the head of the sentence should not be separated from its governing word unless it contains a verb : adverbial clauses placed in the same position should be separated by a comma :

“Shortly afterwards the rest of the party came in.”

“In despite of all our efforts to detain him, he insisted on leaving.”

“During the two generations which followed this crusade, the power of the papacy had been at its height.”

14. Adverbial phrases or clauses placed at the end of the sentence are separated by commas if they are non-restrictive, but are not so separated if they are restrictive :

“We will take a walk for an hour, and he will certainly have arrived by the time we return.”

“He has not succeeded, though I am sure he has done his best.”

15. An adverbial phrase in the body of the sentence should not be enclosed in commas unless it is of some length. An adverbial clause or phrase containing a verb should be so enclosed :

“I shall at once inquire into the matter.”

“I hope, on my return from the continent next week, to come and see you.”

“I should return it, if I were you, at the earliest possible moment.”

16. An appositive, whether it precedes or follows its principal, should be separated from it by a comma ;

“A man of the world, he was accustomed to such things.”

“I will send you a recommendation to Watson, my agent in Paris.”

But where the appositive is only used to distinguish one thing from others of the same kind the comma is not used :

“King George V. was preceded by King Edward VII.”

“Milton’s drama *Samson Agonistes* is one of the few good English dramas written in the Greek manner.”

17. If the appositive is formally introduced, it is often separated by a dash :

“There is one thing I should like to discuss—the superannuation scheme.”

If the sentence continues after the appositive, the dash should be used both before and after.

18. Where a number of sentence elements collectively stand in the relation of an appositive, yet do not separately do so, these elements should be introduced by a dash :

“He related his early struggles—his life at home, his adventures abroad, and the hardships he endured.”

19. All parenthetical interpolations in the sentence—that is, all elements which stand in no syntactic relation to either subject or predicate—should be enclosed in commas :

“The patient is, we regret to announce, much worse to-day.”

20. Absolute phrases, wherever they may stand in the sentence, should be enclosed in commas :

"Such being the case, the best thing we can do is to go."

"We shall leave, weather permitting, at noon."

"We shall leave at noon, weather permitting."

In the same way, all such parenthetical expressions as *on the other hand*, *to be sure*, *moreover*, *nevertheless*, should be enclosed in commas.

21. Conjunctive adverbs, as distinct from pure adverbs, when placed at the head of the sentence, should not be separated by a comma :

"Nevertheless we arrived in time."

"Thus it happened . . ."

"Otherwise it would have been impossible."

But the two conjunctive adverbs *besides* and *however* should both be separated, the former in order to distinguish it from the preposition, and the latter to distinguish it from the pure adverb :

"Besides, his business is declining rapidly."

"However, we went by the next train."

22. Anything in the nature of an after-thought, emendation, or similar addition to a statement should be introduced by the dash, and followed by the dash if the emendation does not close the sentence :

"The chairman will return to-morrow—at least, so he said."

"Frankland—I mean the younger one—has resigned his post."

23. The vocative should be enclosed by a comma.

If it has exclamatory force it should be followed by an exclamation mark :

“ William, bring me my boots ! ”

“ Poor boy ! I am sorry for you.”

24. When a sentence is abruptly broken off, the break should be marked by a dash :

“ We are now approaching—but I forgot to tell you . . . ”

25. If the subject consists of numerous elements and it is felt desirable to summarise them by some such word as *such*, *these*, the summarising word should be introduced by a dash :

“ Choice cookery, delicious wines, lovely women, hounds, falcons, horses, newly discovered manuscripts of the classics, sonnets and burlesque romances in the sweetest Tuscan, just as licentious as a fine sense of the graceful would permit, plate from the hand of Benvenuto, designs for palaces by Michael Angelo, frescoes by Raphael, busts, mosaics, and gems, just dug up from the ruins of ancient temples and villas—these things were the delight and even the serious business of their lives.”

26. A verb of saying which introduces a direct quotation should be separated from it by a comma, but if the quotation is very short, the comma may be omitted :

“ He whispered in my ear, ‘ Come back in an hour.’ ”

“ The driver shouted ‘ Stop.’ ”

27. A noun clause is not usually separated by a comma. If there are two or more co-ordinate noun clauses, they should be separated by commas :

“ The Home Secretary thought that such action was undesirable, that it would promote ill-feeling.”



28. The apostrophe is used :

(a) In the possessive case of nouns : *John's, Scott's novels.*

(b) To replace omitted letters in the contracted form of a word : *don't, isn't, haven't.*

(c) To form the plural of letters of the alphabet, or of words taken by themselves :

"You should dot your *i's* and cross your *t's*."

"There are too many *and's* in this essay."

In this case the letters or words should be italicised.

29. Direct quotations should be enclosed in quotation marks, but not indirect quotations : "He said, 'I am sorry,'" "He said that he was sorry," but not "He said, 'that he was sorry.'"

A quotation within a quotation should be enclosed within single quotation marks : "After that," he continued, "the patient said, 'Give me some water.'"

30. When a quotation mark and an exclamation mark both follow a word, the meaning alone determines which comes first. If the quotation is a question, the question mark is a part of the quotation, and should come first. If the question mark refers to the whole sentence, including the quotation, then it is evidently not a part of the quotation, and should follow the quotation marks :

"He merely remarked, 'Is the man mad?'"

"Did he say, 'Is the man mad'?"

• 31. Words in a quotation enclosed in parenthesis marks ( ) are a part of the quotation ; words enclosed in brackets [ ] are interpolations of the writer.

32. Quotation marks are also used as an apology for slang or nicknames. Such apology should not be made in a colloquial text, nor in actual reported speech :

“ They thought it was time ‘ to throw up the sponge.’ ”

“ They decided to give it to ‘ Pepper ’ Jones.”

33. Where a writer wishes to indicate that a statement is only a conjecture, he may do so by placing a question mark within parenthesis marks : “ This happened in A.D. 18 (?) ”

### Capitals

Capital letters are used :

1. At the beginning of every sentence.
2. At the beginning of every line of poetry. This practice is not always followed, though it is useful when poetry is printed continuously in the form of prose.
3. The first word of a direct quotation, though not of fragments of sentences, is printed with a capital.
4. For all proper nouns.
5. In adjectives formed from proper nouns.
6. In titles when they are used with the names of a person or in actual reference to some particular person.
7. In titles of books, works of art, newspapers, etc., the first word, as well as every important word—noun, verb, adjective—is written with a capital.
8. Personal pronouns referring to the deity are often written with initial capital.
9. The names of public bodies and associations of various kinds are often written with initial capitals : *The British Association, The State, The University of London, Parliament.*

10. Historical events are also sometimes capitalised : *The Great Rebellion, The French Revolution, The Norman Conquest.*

11. The geographical divisions—north, south, east, west—are sometimes written with capitals when they refer to a particular part of a country : *North versus South.*

### Italics

Italics should be represented in manuscript by underlining the words to be italicised. The following are the principal uses of italics :

1. Titles of books, journals, reviews, newspapers, works of art, musical works, etc., should be written in italics : Milton's *Comus*, *The Saturday Review*. The author's name should not be included in the italics and the title should be quoted exactly, not omitting a preliminary *the* or *a*.

2. The names of ships are often italicised.

3. A word used as a word, and not for the thing which it represents, should be written in italics or enclosed in quotation marks :

"The misuse of *pretty* has almost destroyed its meaning."

"*Parliament* should be written with a capital P."

4. A word not yet fully naturalised should be written in italics :

"*Bona fide* travellers."

"He has a different *Weltanschauung*."

## CHAPTER X

### FIGURES OF SPEECH

FIGURES of speech, and especially metaphors, have always been, and still are, the great fertilisers of language. They afford a means of expression where all other means have failed, especially when the imagination is most busy. All thinking consists of comparisons, whether of similarity or of dissimilarity, and therefore all language, as being the expression of thought, must also consist of comparisons, expressed or implied. Hence when new words are wanted for new things or for new thoughts, they are formed on the basis of a comparison with existing things or with old thoughts. The new word is either a compound of two existing words, or of one existing word and a suffix or prefix, and in either case there is an implied comparison between the new thing and the older ones. There are, it is true, other possibilities of word formation: an existing word may be given a new meaning, but in this case there is also a comparison, and the resemblance of the new to the old must be particularly close if an old word is to stand for them both. For example, the internal combustion engine was developed to a high state of efficiency and then used as a means of locomotion. The combination

of the driving force or machine and the thing driven was called a *motor-car*, a word in which certain senses of the words *motor* and *car* are united, on the basis of a comparison, to stand for the new thing. In exactly the same way new meanings of existing words develop. As a result of very close resemblance, one word is used to express a new idea which closely resembles the old one. The innovation is only possible because of the closeness of the resemblance, for otherwise the word with the new meaning would not be understood. But the first use of a word with a new meaning of this kind is a metaphorical use, and it is thus that metaphor enriches language.

When we imply that two things different in kind resemble each other, we use a metaphor. *Life's journey* is a metaphor, because *life* and *journey* are different in kind, and are yet brought together by reason of certain resemblances. But the resemblances between things, experiences, and thoughts are innumerable, and hence the scope of metaphor is also unlimited. Every object, every thought, every incident in life, will be seen in as many different lights as there are individuals who see, think, or experience them. Every individual sees things from a slightly different angle of view, according to his experience of life, his education, and so on. Hence to each individual the relations between things, their resemblances, and their differences will be different. It is just this personal point of view which figures of speech can often express where other means fail. Words with their ordinary meanings may not quite meet the case, but used metaphorically, away from their exact sense, they may suggest the relation which is in the

mind of the writer ; they may suggest what is only faintly perceived ; they " may satisfy the heart " though they do not convince the reason. The sentence " The news was a dagger in his heart," will illustrate this point. There is no sense of the word *news* to be found in the dictionary which will coincide with any sense of the word *dagger*, but *news* in a context suggests all sorts of things. It was—what ? Good ? Bad ? What was the effect of it ? These and many other thoughts are awakened in the mind when we read the word *news*. To these questionings the word *dagger* comes as an answer. But what was the effect of the news ? Being bad news it may have cut the heart, or it may have pierced the heart. But we read that it was a dagger to the heart. Whichever of the three expressions might have been used, it would still have been a metaphor, but there is a great difference in the meaning of the three. By using the word *dagger* the writer suggests more than if he had said *cutting*, for the word *dagger* brings with it a host of associations which the word *cutting* does not bring. Some of these associated meanings are appropriate to the occasion, some of them are not ; but the context and the mind act as a filter, which separates those elements of meaning which complete the impression from those which do not.

The difference between the metaphor and the simile is that in the former the comparison is implied, and in the latter it is expressed. The following examples show metaphor :

"Mont Blanc is the monarch of the mountains."

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,

Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

"He is a master of his craft."

Coming events cast their shadows before."

While, on the other hand, consists in the direct comparison of one thing with another, the comparison usually being shown by some such word as *like* or *as* :

"Red as gold. Green as grass."

"Pity, like a new-born babe,  
Striding the blast."

"Where delicious Paradise,  
Now nearer, crowns with her enclosure green,  
As with a rural mound, the champion head  
Of a steep wilderness."

Care should be taken not to mix metaphors. A mixed metaphor is one in which more than one source of comparison is used. Perhaps better than any further comment on their nature would be the quotation of a celebrated mixed metaphor :

"I smell a rat ; I see it in the air ; but I will nip it in the bud."

The use of metaphor, like the use of any other stylistic device, should not be overdone. Since it is used to bring out meanings which it is not easy to express otherwise, and which are more or less remote and unusual, it follows that expression by metaphor puts a greater strain on the mind of the reader than expression in direct language ; and even if the metaphor is only used, as it often is, to illustrate or amplify a thought already stated, it still tends to be wearying if used to excess.

When a comparison is prolonged and drawn out into detail, the figure is known as allegory.

The commonest figures of speech, in addition to metaphor and simile, are the following :

**Synecdoche.**—In this figure the species is put for the genus, or *vice versa*, the concrete for the abstract, the part for the whole, or *vice versa*. Also the material is put for the thing which is made of it, or an individual name is put for a whole class :

“To earn one’s bread.” “The vessel has arrived.”  
“All the world knows him.”

“A healthy lad, and carried in his cheek  
Two steady roses that were five years old.”

“All the wit and learning of the land were assembled there.”

“A bolt from the blue.” “A fleet of a hundred sail.”  
“All hands on deck.” “A girl of twenty summers.”

“The lavish moisture of the melting year.”

“Wine from the wood.” “To wash linen.”

“A Daniel come to judgment.”

**Metonymy.**—In this figure a thing is named by one of its accompaniments. The container is used for the contained, the effect for the cause, or *vice versa*, the instrument for the agent, the sign for the thing symbolised, the name of the maker for his works, the name of a feeling or passion for its object :

“He keeps a good cellar.” “They have the power of the purse.”

“He desperate takes the death  
With sudden plunge.”

“The pen is mightier than the sword.” “He has a fluent tongue.”



"The prisoner addressed the bench." "The chair ruled the amendment out of order."

"Bring your Shakespeares with you." "Have you got a Bradshaw or a Baedeker?"

"He is the wonder of the age."

**Transferred Epithet.**—In this figure some epithet properly belonging to one word is used of another :

"He passed a sleepless night."

"A lackey presented an obsequious cup of coffee."

"It was a weary journey."

**Contrast.**—The value of this figure is that it introduces a statement in the nature of a surprise. It is also helpful in elucidating a point by showing the obverse side of it. The commonest figure of contrast is antithesis, which consists in contrasting one word or thought with another :

"He followed the letter, but not the spirit of the law."

"All the weapons of carnal and spiritual warfare were employed."

"I am your master, not your slave."

**Epigram.**—The epigram is an apparent contradiction in terms, with a real foundation of meaning below. It is usually short and pointed :

"The child is father to the man."

"The king is dead, long live the king!"

"In the midst of life we are in death."

**Innuendo.** is a figure of speech in which the real meaning is insinuated or suggested only :

"He did not consult physicians, for he hoped to die without them" (Bain).

**Irony.**—By this figure the writer says the opposite of what he means, though it is clear from the context, that he does not wish his words to be taken literally :

“ Here under leave of Brutus and the rest  
(For Brutus is an honourable man ;  
So are they all, all honourable men) ;  
Come I to speak in Caesar’s funeral.  
But Brutus says he was ambitious ,  
And Brutus is an honourable man.”

**Interrogation** is a figure of speech used to quicken the attention by seeming to ask for an answer, though none is needed :

“ Am I my brother’s keeper ? ”  
“ Hast thou a charm to stay the morning star  
In his steep course ? ”

“ Am I not free to do as I choose ? ”

**Apostrophe, Vision.**—Apostrophe consists in direct address to the person or thing, occupying the mind of the writer. Vision consists in the representation of the absent as present :

“ Come, y’ou spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here.”  
“ Even now, methinks, as pondering here I stand,  
I see the rural virtues leave the land.”

**Personification** is closely allied to apostrophe. It consists in attributing life to inanimate objects :

“ Hence, loathed Melancholy,  
Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born.”  
“ Hence, vain deluding joys,  
The brood of Folly without father bred ! ”

**Hyperbole** is an exaggerated statement of the truth made with a view to strengthening the effect :

“Waves mountains high.”

“I am tired to death.”

“All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.”

**Climax** is the arrangement of a series of thoughts in such a way that there is a rise in intensity or significance.

“Some books are to be tasted, others swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.”

The opposite of climax is **anti-climax** or **bathos**, which consists in the arrangement of a series of thoughts or words in a descending order of importance :

“He lost his wife, his child, his goods, and his dog at one fell swoop.”

**Litotes** is a figure of speech in which a negative statement is made where a strong affirmative is intended :

“The man is no fool.”

“A citizen of no mean city.”

Any intentional understatement may be included in this figure.

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